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DANDY DAVE, And His Horse, White Stocking; or, Ducats or Death.

BY "BUCKSKIN SAM"—Major Sam S. Hall,

AUTHOR OF "DIAMOND DICK," "THE TERRIBLE TONKAWAY," "KIT CARSON, JR.," "BIG FOOT WALLACE," ETC.



"HERE WE ARE AGAIN, WHITE STOCKING! AM I RIDING TO MY FATE?"

Dandy Dave,

And His Horse, White Stocking;

OR,

DUCATS OR DEATH.

A Story of Texan Treachery and Texan Honor.

BY BUCKSKIN SAM,

AUTHOR OF "CHAPARRAL CARL," "MOUNTAIN MOSE," "BAYOU BRAVO," "CROOKED THREE," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

DIAMOND CUT DIAMOND.

"WELL, Lancelot Lanewood; 'here I am, as you diskiver, all the way from Roarin' River! What new kink have you got in your noddle, that you send for your old pard to straighten it out?"

"But, I say, drop your revolver! It may explode, and I'm not quite ready to be shot."

"Well, hanged if you haven't shot it on me like one of the tidal waves on this cussed coast!"

"Bob Barnes, old boy, shake! You're right on the spot every time. It's good for sore eyes to get a gaze at your figure-head. That's honest Injun."

"I wish I could always lay my bets on the right spot, Lance; but, if I could, I shouldn't have turned up here among the sand-fleas. I'm flat broke, pard. Pick up your cigar. Don't waste tobacco."

"Then, I'm rejoiced that luck has been dead ag'in' you, or I should now be denial the extreme pleasure of taking a grip at your card-flipper."

"Bob, I'm as glad to see you as I should be my attorney, if he came to announce the fact that my great-grandmother had defuncted, leaving me a legacy of a cool hundred thousand pesos."

The man who had first spoken sprung through a door, which he had opened quickly, but silently, into a well-furnished room in a hotel at Port Lavaca, on the coast of the Mexican Gulf, but a short distance from Matagorda and Indianola.

The occupant of the room was a man who was seated at a table perusing some letters, and with a half-consumed cigar between his lips. But the instant he saw the intruder, he sprung to his feet, his face turning pallid, and the cigar dropping from his lips to the floor; while, with the rapidity of lightning he jerked a revolver and presented it.

However, as the words of the pair indicate, the weapon was put up, and the hands of the worthy—or unworthy—pair met in a hearty grasp.

The new-comer, who was addressed as Bob Barnes, was a strongly-built man, of perhaps thirty-five years of age, some five feet six inches in height, and with broad shoulders. His head was large, and of the variety commonly called bullet-head.

His hair was close cut, and his eyes were sharp, and black in color, but treacherous in their expression, and avoiding the gaze of the person he addressed.

His face was red and bloated. His ears were noticeably large, and he was attired in a flashy manner, with "loud" rings on his fingers and a large pin in the middle of his not very immaculate shirt bosom.

A plaited chain, formed of enormous links, dangled from about his neck; but it had become somewhat disarranged, for, in place of having a watch at its terminus in the vest pocket, one could see that only a bunch of keys was attached.

The watch had, in all probability been loaned by Bob Barnes to his "uncle."

Altogether he presented a rather seedy appearance, his flashy attire being much worn and soiled, though he seemed to bestow no thought upon that subject. Evidently, he was as relieved and pleased to meet the man he had so startled, and whom he addressed as Lancelot Lanewood, as the latter professed to be to see him.

Lance Lanewood was about the same height as Bob, but of a slighter build. This, however, was made up for, by his rapid movements. His instantaneous action, upon the startling entrance of Bob Barnes, proved this. Also, that he was of a very nervous temperament. And, more than this, that he had good cause to fear some one might "get the drop" on him.

In fact, an observer would have judged that the man was a criminal, who expected an officer of the law to burst in on him at any time.

That he would shoot to kill, in such a case, none could doubt who saw his desperate look; which, however, melted away, as he recognized who it was that had intruded upon his privacy.

It was true that Bob Barnes had been expected, but not at any particular time; and certainly it was not to be supposed that he would dash into a room, like an officer making a rush upon a criminal.

There was a comical expression in Bob's eye; in fact, it was with difficulty that he restrained the most boisterous laughter, when he saw the pallor of Lanewood's face, and his desperate, hunted look.

The latter well knew that Barnes had made his *entree*, thus, expressly to enjoy the shock and alarm which it would cause him; but Lanewood betrayed no anger, for the very good reason that he was not in a position to do so, as he wished to be on the most friendly terms with Bob.

The face of Lanewood was sharp, and his eyes of a grayish tint, which assumed a greenish hue when he was angry or excited. With the exception of chin-whiskers, he was clean-shaven; his lips indicating cunning and treachery, as well as the most merciless cruelty, when studied in connection with his strangely-changing eyes.

His goatee caused his face to appear longer and sharper, and his hair was worn long, being very dark, and straight and coarse as that of an Indian.

Strong and wiry was he, as one would at once notice, but his face was just the opposite, in expression and lack of fullness, to that of Barnes—his skin being devoid of color, and almost cadaverous in appearance.

Unlike his visitor also, was he attired, his garb being rather of the clerical order, of black broadcloth. It was, besides, of costly grade, and fashionably and recently made.

Both men wore the black, wide-brimmed, soft felt hats, such as were commonly worn by planters and rancheros, not far located from the Gulf of Mexico. That both of them were unmitigated rascals—perhaps criminals—one versed in reading character by faces and expressions, would at once decide, and also from the manner of one to the other. Their words indicated that they had been partners in many a plot.

"Satan burn the cigar! There's more in the bar."

Such was the reply of Lanewood to the economical suggestion of his pard, and it seemed to have a very joyous effect upon him. He, at once, slung his sombrero recklessly across the room, then sprung to his feet, and again caught up the hat, exclaiming:

"Now, you're talking solid sense, Lance! Let's glide to the bar. I need about two drinks, of four fingers each, and an A 1 Havana between my teeth, before I can either talk or listen."

"All right," said the other; "but don't get on one of your old rampages, Bob. We must go slow here. This ain't New Orleans, where one can keep shady for a month of Sundays, and no one be the wiser."

"I'll order up the drinks and cigars, for I've got a big thing in my head, which will pan out rich if we play our cards right. But, we must steer clear of bar and card-rooms for the present. You shall have all the brandy you can pour down, if you'll keep your head steady."

As Lance spoke, he touched the bell, and then seated himself again at the table.

"Now, that's straight out biz, from the word 'go!' Now you suit old Bob to a dot; but, don't sling a word o' ther big biz until I get outside of my fluid lightning, for my brain is dull."

"When did you arrive, and where land?"

"Came on the Morgan Line. Struck the Indianola pier before sun-up this morning, and after breakfast at the Casimir House staged her through; and here I am, chuck-full of curiosity to know what's up, and how you've kept yourself gold-plated, so to express it. So proceed to propound! How dost thou procure the dust, and keep thy head above the raging merciless waves of impecuniosity?"

"When did you get my letter, Bob?" asked Lanewood, with an absent look, appearing not to have heard a word that had been said.

"Well, I don't know as it makes any difference when I got it as long's I'm here," retorted Bob, somewhat affronted; "you think talk is cheap, I reckon, or you'd answer a civil question."

At this moment, however, a welcome sight met Bob's eyes, and banished his anger at the absent-mindedness of his pard this being the negro, with cigars, brandy and glasses, which he placed on the table, asking, obsequiously:

"Am dat all yer wants, marse?"

"That's all. Git!" said Lance, impatiently, and with an angry scowl upon his face.

The darky lost no time in obeying the surly order, the door instantly closing after his rapidly retreating form.

Without a word, Lance poured out two "stiff horns" of brandy, Bob being on hand to clutch one on the instant the liquor ceased flowing.

The fiery fluid, undiluted, was swallowed at a single gulp by both. Then Lanewood selected a cigar, bit off the pointed end, ignited the weed, and leaned forward in his chair, earnestly regarding Barnes, who was helping himself to another drink, with much evident satisfaction. Though Lanewood well knew his pard's ways, he spoke no word of remonstrance, but waited, it was plain to see, impatiently.

Barnes selected a cigar, and then, with the

manner and motion of a cat after a too hearty meal, he walked around the table and stood facing Lanewood, his little black eyes twinkling in their framework of bloated flesh, and an expression of content and enjoyment manifested. This was strongly blended with an utter unconcern as to whether the world continued to revolve, or came to a sudden stop, destroying all living things upon its surface.

Most certainly he did not care a copper cent whether Lanewood liked his way of conducting himself or not. It was evident that Bob knew himself to be an important personage, even if he had gotten down to his last dollar.

He was aware that the man before him—his old pard—needed him; that he needed him bad, or he would not have sent to New Orleans for him. Bob knew his power, and exercised it. Any one entering the room would have supposed him to be the entertainer, and not Lancelot Lanewood.

A great change had come over both since the first greetings had been passed.

Each was studying the other, recalling the ways and peculiarities of his pard under certain circumstances.

Lanewood was endeavoring to decide how much of his plan, or plot, he could with safety reveal to Barnes and not give the latter too great a hold on him; also, in regard to the least amount of money he could promise, and yet retain the services of Bob in the important work he had before him.

Bob, too, was wondering what was running in his old pard's head, the nature of his new scheme, and about how much money it would be safe to "strike" Lance for. At the same time, he was speculating as to what degree of danger he ought to decide to brave, in the service proposed, but not as yet understood by him.

In fact, each of the pair, although pards, was studying in what manner he could overreach the other—Lance to save as much as was possible, and Bob to "corral" and "cache" as much as he could.

And, to look into the eyes of the brace of villains, it really seemed that it would be a "diamond-cut-diamond" game.

CHAPTER II.

THE PLOT.

WITH a self-contented air that was exaggerated to the borders of the ludicrous, Bob Barnes slowly turned his chair around, and sunk into it with a lazy air. He then leaned back indolently, and gazed at the ceiling of the room.

With the utmost indifference as far as attitude and expression, Bob never once so much as looked at the face of his confederate, whose eyes flashed the indignation it would be imprudent to express or give vent to in words. But suddenly he spoke, controlling his anger:

"Now, Barnes, let us come to business! I know you are anxious to know why I sent for you, though you do put on such infernally independent airs. From the fact that you are dead broke, as you acknowledge, I judge that you may be ready to lunge into anything that promises the ducats."

"There's where you're right, Lance; but I'm the same old cuss yet, and so are you."

"I know you like a book, and I don't propose to waste my breath with extra gab. Drive on! I believe you've seen me before, and have rowed in the same boat, which, on some occasions, required a heap of bailing to keep above water."

"Spin out, when you get ready; I'm listening. You know, when I get my cards, I can play a fair game, and can flip in a few extra pasteboards when I'm short of trumps. Deal away, old pard!"

"All right. We'll drop banter, and dive into biz. As you say, it's my deal, but I want a pard in the game, for the stakes are high and our opponents are not fools, by a long shot."

"Bob, I made a big strike at Galveston, but I've spent the money like water; besides, I ran in a cold deck, and it isn't healthy now for a man of my feeble constitution in the Island City."

"I'm a man of refined tastes, must have my luxuries and live in style, if I give up knocking around and settle down. Consequently, I have determined not only to make a break toward winning a big pile, but at the same time to gain revenge upon one whom I swore, two years ago, to humble in the dust and bring to misery."

"I shall give you my entire confidence in the whole matter. We will sink or swim together. If we swim, we'll both be rich as lords, for you shall share equally with me; you stick to me throughout. There is danger, Bob, and there are chances of our getting rubbed out if we don't keep our eyes peeled, and fight like the Old Boy, if necessary. We will, if you accept my terms and work with me, stake our lives against winning a princely fortune."

Lanewood paused for breath, and Barnes replied:

"Glide along, Lance! I'm with you every time. Ducats or death air my war-cry."

"That's the way I like to hear you talk, Bob. It sounds more natural. But, to proceed:

"You have heard me mention that Major Maurice Moreland was my brother? He is, as you know, a planter on the Brazos."

"Yes, I recall the fact."

"Well, the major is quite wealthy, and has two children, his wife being dead. I have not seen him in nearly two years, and then he insulted me most grossly, forbidding me his house. All that was because I had made love, somewhat energetically, to a young lady who was visiting them."

"Just so," said the other, with a laugh. "Lance, it seems, as usual, that there is a woman at the bottom of it. Why don't you draw it mild? You can't succeed with women, in your rough way."

"As to that, Bob, I have ideas and opinions of my own; but we wander from the subject. I have never forgotten the insult my brother thrust upon me. But, of late, a thirst for vengeance has rankled in my mind, and a certain discovery has caused me to swear, over and over again, a terrible revenge."

"However, I could hold myself in check well enough, if there was not a fortune to be made, in case I succeeded in my plans."

"Maurice Moreland knows that I am his brother, which is a big card in my favor. But, did he know the true relationship in which we stand toward each other he would be the happiest man on earth."

"Our father—I say *our*, at present—Montague Moreland, married two wives—the first being my mother, the second the mother of Maurice."

"This is believed by everybody; but I find that the marriage to my mother was a sham. She, I am compelled to say, was a crafty and designing woman, who cared nothing for my father. She died at my birth, and my reputed father, soon after, married the woman who became the mother of Maurice Moreland. But, that is not all."

"Old Montague had been drugged by my mother, and they were married by a friend of hers, who personated a clergyman. The mock marriage was for the purpose of robbery; but the bogus minister got away with all the loose cash, and my mother remained, from necessity, with the man whom she claimed as her husband."

"Now I am considered the legitimate son of Montague Moreland, and have a double reason for seeking revenge; for my reputed father, who always believed himself to be such, executed a will in favor of his youngest son Maurice, leaving me but a comparatively small sum."

"The cause of my not being made an equal heir with Maurice was, that I had been a wild, harum-scarum youth, drinking to excess now and then, and losing heavily at cards."

"Now, there are no living persons who know what I have revealed to you, except myself and the traitorous confederate—husband in reality—of my delectable mother. He, I may as well say, is my true father. I once met him in New Orleans, when he claimed me as his son, and told me the whole story."

"He asserted that all was seemingly square, and I could claim my rights in the future, as the legitimate son of Montague Moreland. No claim of mine, he said, would ever be disputed, provided I gave him—the infernal scoundrel—a share."

"However, he was killed, shortly after our interview, in Jackson Square, New Orleans, while attempting to rob a man who was sleeping beneath the oleanders, and whom he supposed to be drunk."

"I reckon, by this time, Bob, you begin to see into my little game. How is it?"

"Well, Lance, you are wrong, for I confess I can't make head or tail to it. You have the most mixed up family history I ever knew. Do you intend to resurrect some old will in your favor? If so, count me out of the game. Not any of that for Hannah, if you please!"

"You've got my head in a whirl, trying to keep the run of your near ancestry. Shove the brandy, will you; and try and sift things out a little more plain, if you intend to proceed further."

"Bob, you have got either too much brandy on board, or not enough. Which is it?"

"It's cussed hard to determine what you're trying to come at, Lance—that's all I know."

"It's as plain as A, B, C. I tell you! Don't you understand that I've been insulted, and wronged out of my inheritance, by one who is supposed to be my brother? He rolls in wealth, which is partly mine, as our supposed relationship stands."

"If he was out of the way, his money would go to the son and daughter. Then, if the boy, Munroe Moreland, should accidentally follow suit, the daughter, Mamie, would remain. In that case, I reckon her old uncle—her nearest living relative you know—could find a way to take care of her."

"Good, better, best, old pard! Drive on!"

"Then you tumble to my little game, this trip, Bob?"

"Just gaze at the dimples in my cheeks,

Lance. Why couldn't you have spit it all out at first, and not plunge away back into family history? I don't care about the background to a picture. I always look at the bright, clear tints in the foreground."

"But, remember, there is danger in this, Bob. However, it is a big stake we are playing for. I reckon we two can run the racket through, without losing a hair. We can but try. Only one thing bothers me, and that is, the major's son is as quick as lightning, and as cunning as an Apache. He knows me, and hates me like Satan."

"I once gave him a cowhiding, in the bottom timber, for not running to the ranch after some ammunition for me. He felt the disgrace, and the little cuss swore he'd pay me back, some day."

"You're not afraid of a boy, are you?"

"Boy! He's sixteen, and a perfect terror."

"Well, what have you done in this new scheme?"

"I have spies in San Antonio, and I find that Moreland is about 'pulling-up stakes' in the Brazos, and intends locating in the stock country, west of San Antonio. That will make it ever so much easier."

"Why not hire some Greasers to wipe them out?"

"I had that idea, but it would go hard with us, in that country, if we were even suspected of shooting either the father or son. What—"

Lanewood was interrupted by a rap on the door. He sprung to his feet, clutching his revolver. Barnes, also, showed more agility than was usual with him.

A moment's reasoning, however, banished all fears, and they reseated themselves. Lanewood concealed his revolver, as he called out, in a tone which, in spite of himself, betrayed much of curiosity, and a fraction of suspicion:

"Come in!"

The door opened, and a swarthy Mexican stepped across the threshold, removing his sombrero; and saying, as he shot a glance into the eyes of the arch plotter:

"Senor Lanewood, Antonio Corrallo has come. He stands before you, and his *cuchillo* is sharp."

Lance Lanewood sprung forward, with joy in his eyes, and grasped the hand of the Greaser, leading him forward to the table, and introducing him to Bob Barnes.

CHAPTER III.

DANDY DAVE.

It was a beautiful moonlight night in 185—, that a horseman, who allowed his animal to proceed at a walk, approached the suburbs of San Antonio de Bexar, from the east, on the well-worn road, traversed by the large trains of ox and mule wagons, which were then the only means of transportation in the Lone Star State.

Over this road, all the vast quantities of munitions of war and commissary stores for the use of the troops at the many frontier posts were conveyed to the United States storehouses, from the vessels arriving at Matagorda Bay.

But the citizen wagon-trains far exceeded in number those of the Government, for all the towns, villages, and ranches in Western Texas depended upon San Antonio for their supplies.

This road, in the olden time, was one almost unbroken line of wagons, the night air being filled with weird, strange music, while camp-fires shone all along each side of this great thoroughfare, like myriads of fallen stars.

Slowly, in comparison with the gait that was traveled by the average Texan, the lone rider we have mentioned approached that town, which has been made so notorious in history, from more than one most startling and tragic event having occurred within its limits—the massacre of all the Americans, with one exception—a babe—by the perfidious Santa Anna, being the most horrible. All had been forced to take refuge in an old Roman Catholic Mission, called the Alamo, where, after the bravest and most undaunted resistance, all, including those famous heroes, David Crockett, Colonel Bowie, and the gallant Travers, were slain.

Each side of the road was lined with mesquites some ten feet in height, which extended afar—in fact, surrounding the town. But far ahead the horseman could distinguish a two-story structure, of large size for the time and place, and fronting the road, which, at that point, became a street. Trees grew thick in the rear, and some few on the east side of this dwelling.

It was the habitation of General Twiggs, who, when Texas seceded, turned over the Government property under his charge to the Confederacy, he being then the Commandant of that military district.

The eyes of the traveler at first became fastened upon this dwelling, but no sooner did he catch a view of the low, Mexican dwellings adjacent, than his keen eyes dwelt upon them with seeming pleasure.

This lone rider was a young man, of fine physique and very handsome face, his features being regular, and his form faultless. He was evidently of great strength and uncommon quickness of action.

He was armed with the usual revolver, rifle and bowie, carried by every one at that time.

His hair, of so dark a shade of brown as to seem almost black, hung in long, wavy masses over his shoulders. He wore spurred top-boots, tanned buckskin breeches fringed down the outer seams; a shirt of woolen fabric, with wide-flowing collar, loosely confined by a black kerchief tied in a square knot. A wide-brimmed black hat, with low crown, sat jauntily upon his head.

His equipments were costly and highly ornamental, indicating the man of means. His horse was a dark bay, built for speed and endurance—both of which, judging from its present appearance, had been severely tried on this journey.

Not once did the spurs of the rider touch the flanks of his steed, however. All its movements proved that the beast was young, full of "vim" and "go," also, that it well knew rest and refreshment would soon be enjoyed.

The horse was, as has been said, a bay, but with a white star upon its forehead, all of its legs, from hoof to knee, being also white.

The name of the animal was a very appropriate one.

It was White Stocking.

The lone horseman's real name was David Dubois, but he had not escaped being dubbed with a cognomen, as is customary on the frontier.

He was very particular in his dress and habits, being always neat and tidy under any and all circumstances; everything that went to form his outfit being rich and costly.

In consequence of this he had, by the men with whom he was most intimate, been at once nicknamed Dandy Dave, and the *sobriquet* had adhered to him.

"Here we are, White Stocking," said the young man to his horse, in a voice which proved that he was much gratified and pleased to be not only at the end of his journey, but also that it terminated at that particular point, San Antonio; "I declare it does my eyes and heart good to see the *jacals* and *adobes* again! I wouldn't live on the coast in the slab shanties, with sand-fleas darting around me at every step, and no timber to camp in, for all the universe. Breathing the salt air of the Mexican Gulf is not what it's 'cracked up' to be, when the same is permeated with the strong scent of decayed fish and crabs. I'm glad to get back to old San Antonio; and I know by your manner and actions, White Stocking, that you are fully as much rejoiced. Both of us, I reckon, will fully appreciate a rest just about now. It has been a long trail from Matagorda, on account of the heat and close feed. The animals of the wagon-trains haven't left enough grass on the whole route to satisfy a herd of goats. I promise you, faithfully, I'll never force you down-country again. When we left the Alamo City, things were quite lively for me for a night or two, and you came near being forced to hunt for another master. I wonder what is in store for Dandy Dave during this visit to San Antonio? But, who cares? I reckon I can take care of myself, and you, too, White Stocking. So, amble along toward the ford, and Whittle's stables."

By the time Dandy Dave had ceased speaking, his voice being rich, clear, and musical, the residence of General Twiggs had been left behind, and many *adobe* dwellings of the lower and middle class of Mexicans had been passed.

Taking a turn to the right, down a gently-sloping road, he came within view of the river at the ford, by the foot-bridge. The San Antonio river was broad and shallow at the ford, being but little more than up to a horse's belly, and it appeared to Dave, as he gazed downward, a sheet of corrugated silver. Then, as his beast stepped into the waters, and buried its nose eyes-deep in the same to quench its thirst, the young man saw the moon and stars mirrored below him.

It was, indeed, a most lovely night-scene.

To his right, eastward, beyond the huge water-wheel and the dam, was the high river-bank, upon which were houses of nearly every style of architecture. Down the river, the banks were lined with fig-bushes, and the broad leaved banana, while verdant reeds swayed in the bright moonbeams, and glinted upon the surface of the waters. The river, below the ford, became narrower, and consequently more rapid, black rocks projecting above the surface, and around which the waters foamed and swirled madly.

Ahead of Dave, and a little to the west of the exit from the ford, was a cool, bubbling spring, flowing from the earth, not more than twenty paces from the margin of the river.

In this spring, "Crazy Nace," who was known by all western Texans, and who attended on the monte tables in the Bull's Head—in this spring poor Crazy Nace met his death, having cast himself into it when in the worst stage of that terrible and loathsome disease—small-pox.

He had escaped from his father and nurse, by bounding out of his chamber window in the night time, and in his torturing thirst and burning fever, seeking the cooling spring, to die.

Beyond this, stretched the street leading toward the Main Plaza, past the City Market.

Directly ahead, over the ford, was a side street, leading to the main thoroughfare of the Alamo City. This was Commerce street, which you could follow on, to the mesquites, beyond the suburbs of the town; a turn near the bridge, around the corner of the City Hotel, however, leading to the Alamo Plaza, on the east side of which was the historical Alamo Mission. Here, also, was the Menger House, the largest, and most elegantly built and furnished hotel in all west Texas, at the time of which we write.

Dandy Dave, as soon as his horse had satisfied its thirst, urged the animal across the ford and as he passed up the bank the rider seemed visibly excited for he murmured, aloud:

"Here we are again, White Stocking! Am I riding to my fate?"

And an expression half sad—half vengeful settled upon his fine face as he rode on to the stables of Whittles—to whose good quarters the noble horse was no stranger. Soon they halted before its hospitable door.

In ten minutes more, Dave crossed the street from the stable, and proceeded to partake of a bountiful supper at Whittle's boarding-house and restaurant. After that he strode up Commerce street, until he reached the bar-room of George Horner, next door to the office, composing, and press room combined of the ancient, honorable, and still living and flourishing San Antonio *Herald*, which has more than a local celebrity.

Purchasing a cigar from the jolly German proprietor of the bar, Dandy Dave, after a few friendly remarks and inquiries in regard to the occurrences in the city during his absence, passed out the rear entrance of the bar and card-room, and came into the open air; there being but a few Germans in Horner's establishment, and they unknown to him.

Dave went on, as though he had a special object in view—although he had intended to retire at once, upon entering the town, for he was greatly fatigued—an influence, for which he could not account, urging him on, up Commerce street, and banishing his weariness.

From the direction taken by him, one would have naturally supposed that he was going to try his luck at monte, for he passed the long narrow *Herald* building, in the rear of the Bull's Head, and proceeded to the alley between the celebrated gambling-house just mentioned and the City Market.

But a few paces had Dandy Dave gone, however, when he abruptly halted in his tracks. Then, as instantly, he bounded forward, toward the side-entrance of the Bull's Head bar.

The main building of this establishment, within which was the bar, was of adobe, or sun-dried bricks, the walls three feet in thickness, and having an addition built in the rear, for a monte and fare room. This latter was a rough building, the sides and ends of inch boards.

Dandy Dave had been caused to halt, as recorded, by the sharp crack of a heavy-caliber revolver, within the monte-room, past the end of which he was then walking.

This loud report had been followed by a shriek of agony, and then another shot, while yells, shouts, and curses filled his ears.

Determined to defend the weak against the strong, to stand by those in the right, or right the wrongs of any who were being imposed upon, or taken at a disadvantage, Dandy Dave, clutching his revolver-butt, rushed headlong to the entrance of the monte-room of the Bull's Head.

CHAPTER IV.

EAVESDROPPING.

"SPEAKING of his Satanic majesty, and he has turned up like a harlequin in a pantomime!"

Thus said Bob Barnes, in a theatrical and impressive style, with many flourishes, dropping his roughness of speech and manner, and assuming the air of a man of culture, in a very striking and proficient manner.

This was when he was invited to join the recently-arrived Mexican and Lanewood, in a drink of brandy. Bob was somewhat nettled, at realizing that operations had been begun before his arrival.

Of course his remark was all Greek to the Greaser; or, at least, he understood not that it had any reference to his arrival, or to himself in any way.

Lanewood knew this, or he would have been offended at him. However, all was as it should be. Lance was a wily plotter. That was very evident. All drank, lit cigars, and seated themselves.

The keen dark eyes of Antonio darted piercing glances, with some evidence of nervousness, at each of the Americans. He was fully aware that he was wanted for the purpose of taking human life, which was to favor those before him, and he wished to study the men well.

But, there was little time for this, as Lance plunged directly into the subject that was uppermost in his mind, and for which he had dispatched a messenger for the Mexican now before him.

"This gentleman is my friend, Senor Corril-

lo," he said, waving his hand toward Bob. "He goes to San Antonio with me. Did Pedro Galindo come with you to the hotel?"

"Senor Galindo is in the bar-room," was the reply.

"Bob, will you step down to the bar and ask the Mexican gentleman you will find there to accompany you up to this room?" asked Lanewood.

"With the most exquisite pleasure. So long!"

And whistling an opera air, Barnes left the room in an easy and indolent manner.

On the instant that the door closed, Lance leaned forward and said to Corrillo in Spanish:

"Do you know Major Maurice Moreland, a planter on the Rio Brazos, senor?"

"No!"

"Well, you can't miss him. He enters San Antonio on the third night from this. He has a beautiful daughter, and a son about sixteen years old.

"I want you to entice the son into the mesquites and kill him. Don't leave a breath of life in him—do you hear? He will want to see the sights, as he is greatly interested in Texan history.

"He hates Mexicans"—here the snaky eyes of Antonio glittered, and his white teeth clinched together.

"My friend, who has just left the room, will start with me to-night for San Antonio. You know me. We have had dealings before. This job must be done as secretly as possible. I shall meet you three nights from this, at eleven o'clock, on the Alamo Plaza; for I shall enter in the darkness.

"Your pay is five hundred dollars; two hundred now"—passing a roll of double eagles as he spoke—"and three hundred when the business is completed.

"Here are fifty dollars for Pedro, and he gets a hundred more when the job is done, for assisting you. When all is done, you and your men can take the wagons and goods. I take the girl. Get the best of horses. I bear that expense, and all on the road.

"Start at once—you and Pedro Galindo! There is no time for idle talk. Everything is plain.

"What have you to say? Will you do the deed? Understand that I am soon to join you!"

The Mexican arose, placed the gold in his pouch, and put out his hand, American fashion, saying:

"This boy you speak of shall die. My *cuchillo* shall split his heart. I swear it—I, Antonio Corrillo!"

"Good! You shall lose nothing by serving me. Can you reach San Antonio easily, in the time mentioned?"

"When the sun shines straight down from the sky on the third day from this, Antonio will be eating *chile con carne* on the San Pedro, beyond the Military Plaza. I can get fresh horses on the road."

Lanewood had asserted that Corrillo should lose nothing by serving him; but could the Mexican have foreseen future events, he would have known that he would lose all, even time to repent of his crimes—that he would be sent to his long account by the very man he was then face to face with; and that the bullet which was destined to tear through his brain, would end the greatest torture of mind and body.

Just as Antonio had ceased speaking, the door opened and Bob Barnes entered, followed by a low-browed, swarthy Mexican cut-throat, who was evidently of nearly pure Indian blood.

Antonio was a *Mestizo*, or half-breed.

"I found the senor," said Bob, "and we had a round or two after we had introduced ourselves.

"However, I reckon we can chamber another, and still keep our wits sharp. Have you had sufficient time to arrange matters, Lance?"

"Senors—and you, my Christian friend, Lanewood—here's to better acquaintance with the mysteries of the little biz we have in contemplation!"

The Mexicans touched the brims of their sombreros, clicked glasses and drank, Lance giving a sly wink at Bob and saying, as he replaced his empty tumbler on the table:

"Everything is arranged, Mr. Barnes. These gentlemen start immediately for San Antonio; and we, also, leave this evening. As we have superior horses, we will reach the Alamo City soon after our friends here."

"Adios, senors! Three nights from this we meet in San Antonio de Bexar."

Touching their sombrero-brims, as Corrillo thus spoke, the pair strode gracefully to the door and passed out; Galindo not having as yet seen the color of his gold, and therefore not feeling as friendly toward the *Americanos* as did his comrade.

The state of disinterestedness that had been manifested by Bob, merged into surliness and a disinclination to proceed, which was plainly noticeable. He was irritated the more because Lance did not reveal his own state of mind, by word or the least expression of face.

Lanewood determined to relieve the mind of his pard on the whole matter in due time.

The latter threw himself into a chair, and lifted his legs upon the table in an indolent manner, selecting a fresh cigar, and beginning to puff away, as though he were the only occupant of the apartment.

Without a word, Lanewood stepped to the head of his bed, drew up the mattress, and produced from beneath it a small sachel. From this he took a roll of coin, from which he quickly tore the covering of paper; saying, as he returned to the table and laid the gold before his confederate:

"There, Bob Barnes, wake up and plunge into biz. I know the voyage has, to some extent, broken you up, but you'll be O. K. when we get on the trail. There are five hundred dollars. Go, at once, and purchase the two best horses you can find in town.

"Get whatever we shall need for camping out on the road, for we do not propose to stop at ranches or plantations. We must start this evening, and travel all night; and in the early morning hours too, for the sun is fearfully hot.

"I have made arrangements with that Greaser. He will put the boy out of the way, and collect some Mexicans of his own stamp in San Antonio, who will aid us in capturing the wagon-train.

"I saw at once that Antonio did not care to have a second party present, when he made arrangements with me, which would criminate him. Nothing passed between us, but words in connection with the removal of Munroe Moreland.

"I know Antonio, clear through. I have had him in my service before, and he always kept his word, and carried out my plans to the letter.

"Cheer up, Bob! You can sleep nearly all day to-morrow, in the cool shade; and we'll take a supply of brandy and cigars along. How do you like the prospect? I tell you, old pard, I am confident of making the raffle."

Never did man change more rapidly than did Bob Barnes. He sprang quickly erect, and extended his hand, with a joyous and friendly smile on his red face, blended with relief, as he gazed into that of his partner in villainy.

"Put it there, pard Lance! I'm with you.

"I'll own I was provoked, for I don't want to be forced to absquatulate from a room, to oblige a Greaser; but I see it was necessary to hasten biz. You've accomplished right smart, in a very short time—hang'd if you haven't!

"I'm on the stampede whiz now, and shall be as lively as a cricket after I get a little accustomed to the saddle, and manage to ride off a little of my extra ponderosity.

"Have things ready, Lance, and I'll secure a first-class outfit instant; but we don't want to glide out of this burg until after dark, and then, I reckon, we had better strike down coast for a little distance, before we begin to head up country."

"Now, you talk like your old self, Bob. Strike out, and do the best you can!

"Purchase black planters' hats, woolen shirts, boots and rough breeches, for both of us. You know just the kind of a rig we want.

"I have arms for you and myself, besides an abundance of ammunition."

"All right, Lance; I'm off. So long!"

And Bob Barnes passed from the room of his pard, with surprising swiftness and agility.

When the shadows of night shrouded Port Lavaca in semi-darkness, two horsemen rode from the town passing south for some distance, and then, in a southeasterly direction, toward Chocolate Creek and Victoria Prairie.

These equestrians were Lancelot Lanewood and Bob Barnes, bent on revenge and murder, and outrage—bent upon the ruin and death of a happy family!

Their plans had been fully matured. Their deep-laid schemes had been well considered. The agents, employed to begin the work of villainy and death, were already on the way, and these two murderous wretches followed close after, to complete it.

But as in most such cases, there is, after all, a something lacking to consummate the work; so, here, there was one little circumstance too much—one that was decidedly in the way.

Little thought these miscreant plotters that, in the adjoining apartment, lay a young scout, just from Fort Brown, on the Rio Grande; who, weary and worn, lay upon a bed, sleeping, but, who had been partially aroused by the boisterous entrance of Bob Barnes, and had heard, as in a dream, nearly all of the conversation between the hopeful pair, and also that between Lanewood and the Mexican.

So prostrated, from loss of sleep and continuous riding, was this young man, however, that he sunk into a deathlike slumber, after the departure of Bob, to prepare for the journey.

When, at length, he awoke, in his impatience at not having known the parties, and thinking that what he had overheard was more imagination, after all, than truth—it having been mingled with his troubled dreams—he did not really recall the words thus heard, until some time afterward, when they were brought most forcibly to his mind.

But this will be seen as we proceed.

CHAPTER V.
THE ATTACK.

WHEN Dandy Dave reached the door of the gaming department of the Bull's Head, a scene of confusion met his view. Many were crowding past him, to escape from the room.

It was evident to the young man, that the games had been closed upon the first shot having been fired.

All eyes were bent upon one point—the table to the right of the entrance to the room—many having their hands to their hips, as if about to draw their weapons. Some were pale, and evidently wished themselves anywhere, but just where they were. What had caused this commotion?

Guided by the gaze of the men, Dave cast a glance to the right, when a terrible tableau met his view.

Extended across a table, lying flat, his arms and head hanging limp over the side, his breast upon the money of his bank—much of which had been scattered upon the floor—was a white man, evidently the dealer at the table, on which he lay, a lifeless corpse!

The face of the dead man was turned toward the door, the sightless eyes being fixed directly upon the face of Dandy Dave, as if calling upon him to avenge his murder.

Only one glance did Dave give to this scene, for a more fearful one met his view.

In that flitting glance, he also perceived the bullet hole in the man's forehead, and that another ball had penetrated the left arm of the gambler, near the shoulder.

The scene beyond and below, however—as has been mentioned—instantly drew Dave's attention, and decided him on immediate action.

Stretched upon the floor, was a young man, evidently an American, and astride of him was a most villainous-looking Mexican; his head bare, his black eyes flashing vengefully with a desperate thirst for blood.

In the left hand of the Greaser was held a cocked revolver, the deadly tube being pointed toward the spectators; while, in his right, was a long knife, the glittering blade pointed downward, at the youth's breast!

The arms of the American lay by his sides, and the knees of the would-be assassin were heavily pressed upon the palms of the youth's hands; thus preventing him from making the slightest defense. For all this, not a show of fear was visible in his countenance.

The doomed youth was richly attired, but his eyes were strange in expression, and his breath came and went, in short, quick gasps.

Some two feet from his head, was a Colt's army-size revolver, which had, without doubt, been forced from his grasp by the Mexican.

That the latter had imbibed freely, was apparent; and also that he had been the slayer of the monte-dealer. It was equally evident, that the wretch realized that his doom was sealed—that death was certain, and near at hand.

He was a Greaser of the middle class, daring and reckless from deep potations, and knowing that, having shot an American, death would be meted out to him, by the man's countrymen.

He knew that he would be hanged to the nearest tree, did he not, in some miraculous manner, escape by a bold dash; and he resolved to prevent a rush upon him, by presenting his revolver toward the infuriated crowd.

He also held the life of an American youth at his mercy, at the point of his knife, and the occupants of the room knew that, did they rush upon him he would plunge it into his breast.

These thoughts, too, flashed through the mind of Dandy Dave. There could be no mistake. Each and every conclusion was based upon plain optical proofs. The handsome youth was doomed, and his assassin as well!

The Greasers that had escaped had evidently been the better on the east side of the monte room, as that portion of it was now vacant.

In another moment, the black eyes of the desperate-looking Mexican were fixed upon Dave, and a beast-like snarl issued from between his clinched and grating teeth.

Dandy Dave at once interpreted the look and snarl, and the expression of face.

The young Texan knew that his coming had not only balked the Greaser's plan of escape, but had settled the fate of his victim.

Plainly, if the youth should be slain, he (Dave) would be the innocent cause of the murder.

His appearance had caused a great change in the most important plans of the miscreant Mexican.

He now resolved that he would cause a more startling one.

All this play of thought occupied but a moment.

As the attention of the crowd was attracted by the entrance of Dandy Dave, the click of his revolver sounded sharply, and the loud report of the weapon almost stunned them.

Instinctively the eyes of all flashed upon the assassin, but at that very instant the click and deafening report again sounded.

At the first shot of Dandy Dave, the long knife of the Mexican fell from his shattered hand, the bullet from his revolver having torn through the tightly-clinched fingers, shattering the bones and leaving the digits hanging.

The Greaser having realized, as Dave bounded through the doorway, that the moment of all moments in his life had come—that his way was open for escape by the door, did he act instantaneously, had resolved to stab the youth and then shoot down the new-comer.

But the villain counted without his host.

With a howl of agony, he now sprung to his feet, his revolver brought to bear upon the breast of the man who had mutilated him for life, and, without doubt, arrived in time to prevent his escape—to insure his death!

But, quick as were the movements of the mad Mexican, he was too late. The second shot of Dave sounded like the knell of doom.

With a yell of mingled agony and despair, the Greaser threw up his arms, his revolver fell to the floor, exploding as it left his grasp, the bullet tearing through the coin on the monte-table, by the side of the corpse.

A yell of admiration and relief came from a score of throats. The gamblers, teamsters, rancheros and borderers had recovered from their surprise, and stood with weapons in hand, as the wretched Mexican threw up his mutilated hands, the bones of every finger shattered.

The next moment the American youth, who had been so near to death, sprung to his feet, his comely face contorted with rage; but when he discovered that both hands of the miscreant who had sought his life were shattered in so horrible a manner, thus placing him in a helpless condition, he refrained from striking the mutilated wretch to the floor.

Clutching the hand of Dandy Dave, he exclaimed in a voice of deep feeling:

"You have saved my life, stranger! My guardian angel surely led you here, and had you not come, I should have been dead now!"

"No time for words, little pard," said Dave, in an impressive voice, his eyes wandering from the bleeding Mexican to the passage and doorway, while he listened intently, making an impatient gesture to the crowd, who now pressed forward somewhat boisterously. All of them recognized the young Texan, and were rejoiced at his opportune arrival; at the same time berating themselves as confounded idiots for not having acted as Dave had done, and bored the assassin through and through with their bullets. But this they could not have done.

All that has been recorded, however, took place in a few fitting moments; and it was no wonder that, as the deeply-interested gamblers had been suddenly dumfounded by the report of the Mexican's revolver, and upon turning, had beheld the terrible tableau that we have described—it was not strange that all were, for the moment, so dazed with horror and amazement, at seeing a well-known and square "pasteboard-flipper" lying, a corpse, across his table, among the stacks of coin and chips, which would be of no more use to him.

The gesture of Dandy Dave, who was now the center of attraction, caused all to halt, and become still as death, their weapons gripped tightly, as before. Then Dave spoke:

"That's a first-cut Mexican of the Grande, pards! I know him by sight, but not by name; and I believe he is connected with Cortina. The Greasers who stampeded from here will raise a crowd, and attempt a rescue. They know me, and they know that I deal in lariats, with a noose on one end. They know that I would not shoot to kill, but that I would save the miscreant for the rope. Watch him, pards! What I have just said, you will see, is true. Listen!"

The hideous face of the mutilated Mexican was indeed terrible to behold; but, as Dave spoke, all saw a change in its expression.

There was something of expectation, exultation and relief crowding in, amid the agony and despair that had ruled him. His snake-like, fiery eyes flashed glances at the doorway. Up in the air before him, the assassin still held his blood-dripping hands, his fearfully contorted face being of a yellowish hue. His facial muscles were twitching, his arms and shattered hands quivering, and his whole frame trembling violently.

Thus stood the cowardly villain, his long black hair hanging low over his shoulders, straight and coarse as that of an Indian, his fancifully ornamented, bebuttoned, slashed breeches and *jaqueta* of yellow-tanned buckskin, spattered with blood.

Standing thus, his snaky eyes gazing toward the door, and his form bent forward, he seemed to be listening intently.

The assembled Texans paused, breathless.

"Listen!"

As Dandy Dave spoke, and waved his hand, to command silence—the youth whom he had rescued, standing alongside, revolver in hand—all became as still as death within the gambling-room.

All seemed still, too, without.

But presently, this was changed.

Wild and vengeful yells were plainly heard from outside, on the street, and the tramp of

many feet on the hard pavement—the sounds approaching from the Main Plaza, past the City Market front—became more and more audible.

"Viva Antonio Corrillo! Carajo demonios Texanos! Viva Santa Anna! Viva Mexicanos!"

Such were the mad outcries of the mob of Mexicans that now dashed toward the Bull's Head, to plunge their knives into the hearts of the little band of Texans who, without a word, and as if by common consent, looked to Dandy Dave as their leader.

A hellish exultation blended with the torturing agony, that was seen on the hideous and brutal face of Antonio Corrillo—all now knew the Greaser's name by the yells of the mob—as, standing in the same position that has been mentioned, he gazed over the body of his victim, and toward the door.

CHAPTER VI.

THE COMING CONTEST.

HAD any one looked into the face of Dandy Dave as the name, Antonio Corrillo, was yelled by the Mexicans, he would have noticed a sudden look of determination.

Instantly he jerked his bowie, sprung to a table, and slashing the green cloth, tore from it two long strips. With these in hand, his bowie between his teeth, and his revolver in his belt, he bounded to the rear of the assassin, and forcing his elbows backward, bounded then fast. He then clutched the maimed wretch, and throwing him upon his back, secured his ankles together also.

"Thet's ther racket, Dave! We'll hang ther cuss up, arter we-uns cleans out ther scum."

"Dog-gone him! We-uns 'll fix him arter ther shoot an' cut biz air over."

"Lay him out, 'side o' Bud, what he's sp'iled fer futur' pasteboard flippin', ter gi'n him es much breathe es he kin draw in, 'fore we-uns begins ter squeeze hit outen his condemned carkiss. We-uns wants him ter hev es much vim es possible, when ther lynch pic-nic opens! Tie him tight, pard!"

"Rah fer Dandy Dave!"

"Glide this-aaway, yer yaller howlers! We're hankerin' ter bore yer kiote karkidges."

Such were the cries that came from the Texans.

The change in the expression of Dave's face had been noticed by one. This was the youth whose life he had just saved.

It is perhaps useless to mention that the latter was surprised; but the feeling was increased by observing the close scrutiny the young man gave him when he first approached him with extended hand.

The rescued youth was pale and panting from his violent struggle with the Greaser; but there was no sign of fear betrayed, as the mad yells rung from the street outside.

In a hurried voice, Dandy Dave now addressed the youngster whom he had saved:

"What is your name, my young friend?"

"Munroe Moreland, at your service, and anxious in some way to show my gratitude."

"No time for that now, Mr. Moreland! Boys!"—to the Texans—"pile all the tables in the corner. Then, half a dozen of you get behind them, and shoot down the yellow coyotes we may happen to miss."

"Come on! Last six in the rear hold the fort here. We'll show them a game that beats monte, in furnishing fresh lay-outs at every flip. Follow me!"

As directed, the last six in the crowd rushed hurriedly to the tables, placing them in the form of a barricade, where they could crouch and await the rush of the mob into the apartment.

Between this and the main building and fronting on the street was a narrow space, which was covered, however, by the same roof as the monte-room. A door opened into this space from each side.

Consequently, every one passing from one to the other of these doors could be easily shot or stabbed by any lurker on either side of the walk between them.

Dandy Dave realized at once that he could not post his men upon but one side of the passage, as the bullets would fly through the enemy and kill his men on the opposite side. He therefore led his men to the left side, bidding them construct a barricade of boxes in their front.

In another moment, Bob Caille, the proprietor, had closed up, locking the door from the outside, and then rushing for a few of his friends, to get their assistance in protecting his property from the mob that approached.

Munroe Moreland, as has been stated, had been strangely impressed by the manner of Dandy Dave, and the sudden change in him when he heard the yells of the Mexicans. He had, too, asked him his name, more like a demand than a question. There had been a very perceptible start, also, when the youth answered him, giving his designation.

But there was now no time for words, explanatory or otherwise. Before the barricade of boxes had been half-completed, a loud crash sounded from the bar-room, and the Texans knew that the outer door had been burst inward by the yelling horde.

The Greasers, who had escaped from the monte-room, all knew that, did they not immediately do so, they would be shot down by the Texans.

They were also aware, that Antonio would be lynched, and they resolved to prevent this, if possible; for the villain was very popular with the lawless Mexicans, being more reckless than any other in the Alamo City.

But a moment elapsed, after the crash of the outer door of the Bull's Head, when the inner one also flew from its hinges; and the next instant, with vengeful yells, a dozen Greasers sprung upon the fallen door, all plainly revealed in the flood of light, that shone through the open entrance.

Each held, clutched, his long knife, and many had pistols; some being the deadly Colt's revolvers, for which a Mexican, at that time, was ready to give almost any price.

All became instantly hushed, when they heard not the slightest sound in their front.

All was silence now in the monte-room.

This was unexpected, and was most impressive.

Nothing could have caused them to halt more suddenly. Not a human being was within view.

The rage of many of them changed to suspicion, and then to actual fright. Their yellow faces became ghastly, as they gazed around.

Staring into the deserted monte-room their eyes were blinded by the glare of the lights. Then came a rush upon them, from their rear. This was instantaneous.

There could be no hesitation now. They must be pressed into the monte-room, whether they would or not, and no matter what awaited them.

Like a stampede of buffalo, those in front must rush forward, or be trampled. Those in the rear filled the air with yells and curses.

These sounds encouraged the front ranks.

But, just then, a fearful yell of agony and terror sounded from the monte-room.

The Mexicans in the front gathered their full muscular strength, and with clinched teeth, and their lips curling away from the same like those of savage beasts, darted forward, insane for revenge; for all believed that the yell proceeded from Corrallo, and that he was in the death-agony.

At that moment the passage was lighted up by a sheet of blinding flame; and the report of fourteen Colt's revolvers, fired as one, at a signal hiss from Dandy Dave, rung and reverberated through the passage.

This was followed by shrieks of mortal agony, and yells of despair and death.

The scene, in the illuminated portion of the passage, was now most horrible.

Dead, dying, and wounded Mexicans, in a writhing heap, all covered with blood, lay there; while groans, howls, and moans shot out from the horrible mass of mangled and dead—the hurdling shower of lead having mowed the miscreants down, like dry reeds struck by a fierce "norther."

This sight was too terribly awful for those in the rear, who, with bated breath and ghastly with fright, fled in headlong haste into the street. Down the same they went, toward the ford and foot-bridge, not daring to return toward the plaza, as from it a crowd of Texans were rushing to the Bull's Head.

Those Mexicans who were in the front, and had bounded forward as their comrades pressed them in the rear, were many of them forced into the monte-room, an instant before the hail of lead cut down those behind. There they stood, appalled at the sight in their rear and to the right.

There lay the murdered American, and by his side their comrade, Antonio Corrallo—the latter covered with blood, and the same dripping from the corpse to a pool upon the floor. Upon this the light of the lamps flickered, as also upon the glassy eyes of the corpse, which were fixed on theirs in seeming triumph.

They at once perceived that they were cut off from retreat; that, if a rush was made on the return over their dead and wounded, but few could gain the street.

Death ruled all around them, and would soon claim them as his own.

As the miscreants thus stood frozen in their tracks and paralyzed with fright, a thirst for revenge no longer thought of—only a wild desire to escape occupying their minds—their yellow faces ghastly, and they trembling from head to foot with the most abject terror, then again shot forth that horrible shriek of agony, and they all knew that Antonio Corrallo still lived.

Grasping at this fact as a slight hope, as a drowning man clutches at a straw, thinking that possibly Antonio—if he could be released—might lead them clear of their environment and from their foes, they rushed toward the corpse-laden table, there to find what the reader has seen.

There were the mutilated hands of their comrade; there his terror, despair and agony-filled eyes and contorted visage!

Forward flashed the *cuchillos* to cut Antonio's bonds; vengeful curses, loud as well as deep, filled the monte-room.

But at that very instant, a taunting laugh curdled the blood in the veins of every Greaser.

It was the laugh of Dandy Dave.

One glance behind them was given by all.

Between them and the door was a crescent-like line of Texans, who held in hand their revolvers; the deadly tubes of the weapons being pointed at them, the fingers of the Texans curled about the triggers, and the weapons held in a steady grip, as if screwed into a vise.

Two-score of flashing eyes, and half as many vengeful faces, curdled their blood, and froze the very marrow in their bones.

They could no longer make a movement.

Any breath might be their last.

Death, and a death from which there seemed to be no possible escape, now stared them in the face!

CHAPTER VII.

RECKONING WITHOUT HIS HOST.

ON the afternoon preceding the eventful night on which the tragic scenes were enacted in the Bull's Head monte-room, a small train of wagons, six in number, entered the city of San Antonio by the Austin stage-road, and halted in a compact line on the Military Plaza.

San Antonio de Bexar had, at that time, taken the place of St. Louis as the great depot for supplies; being the principal, and indeed the only fitting-out place for the great Southwest.

But there was no traffic going on in the quiet Military Plaza; there being no mercantile establishment on any of its sides.

The train, which was that of Major Moreland, consisted of five common plantation wagons, which had been prepared for the road, and were covered with white tilts. They were freighted with household effects, provisions, and agricultural implements.

But, in the lead was a wagon which would have at once attracted the attention, and awakened the curiosity and surprise of any one fresh from the States, and even of a Texan; for the latter would have thought it strange to see such a vehicle in a ranchero's train.

This wagon was of a capacity to carry four times as much freight as the common conveyance used by citizens for such purposes, and was known as a Chihuahua wagon.

Trains of these, oftentimes fifty in number, each drawn by eighteen mules—sixteen of these being harnessed four abreast, and a pair as leaders—the outer animals drawing by an iron continuation of the fore axle-tree, which projected through and beyond the hub of the wheel, were often to be seen in San Antonio, lading for their journey to far-away Chihuahua, in Mexico.

Such was the huge vehicle, in the lead, in Major Moreland's train.

The teamster of this wagon was a genuine Texan, of ranch rearing; his name, or at least the cognomen he was known by, being Black-snake Bill.

This had not been bestowed upon him on account of his appearance; but because he gloried in the fact that he was a first-class teamster, and an expert in wielding the mule-whip, called a "blacksnake." Bill frequently asserted that he could snap the cork out of a whisky bottle behind any bar with his whip, or put the Comanche mark on a horse, he riding another animal at full tilt.

This mark, we may here explain, is made by the Comanche Indians splitting the ears of every horse and mule they own, or steal, from a point two-thirds down; thus causing the ear to have the appearance of a swallow's tail.

So much for the driver of the Chihuahua wagon, who was wagon-master as well; the other teamsters being negro slaves, belonging to the major. But now, for the conveyance itself.

It was neither more nor less than a young lady's chamber, drawing-room, and music boudoir combined, and had been specially prepared as such.

The floor was carpeted, a piano occupied a position in the rear, while trunks, chairs, a writing-desk, and a table, were arranged on the sides.

From hooks, attached to the wagon bows, was suspended a richly-colored Mexican hammock, and a neat cot bed was placed in the forward end.

A small rifle, silver-mounted, and a Spanish dagger, could be seen in the scabbards of stamped leather, which were attached to a belt that was buckled around one of the wagon hoops.

The train had scarcely halted, when a youth, upon a hardy half-breed horse, galloped up to the side of Major Moreland, and cried out:

"Father, how long do you remain here? I want to ride around the town, and see the sights. Can I have an hour or so, do you think?"

"Certainly, my son. We shall camp on the Medina to-night, and we are not more than twelve miles from where I intend to strike that river. It is now three o'clock, and we will start about five. That will give us an hour of cool driving, in comparison with what we've had."

"Mamie must go with you, however; and you must take good care of her. Do not go into the Main Plaza, Munroe; it is too crowded."

"All right, father! I'll see that no harm comes to her. We will return before starting time."

The youth little thought that his inspection of San Antonio was to prove so eventful, and put him in the position in which we have seen him.

Munroe Moreland spurred his horse up to the front of the Chihuahua wagon. The tilt rope was loose, and the opening quite wide.

He called out as he rode up:

"Oh, Mamie! I say, sis, show your frontispiece at once, for I'm in a hurry."

On the instant a beautiful girl caught the loose canvas in either hand, thrusting it apart; a smile on her face, and her eyes sparkling.

This was Mamie Moreland; just sweet sixteen—just budding into womanhood—and a model of grace and beauty she was.

Her face was purely Grecian, her eyes large and lustrous, and of a changeable brown.

That she was a passionate lover of flowers, music, and poetry, as well as all the fairest works of Nature, it did not require much knowledge of face-reading to decide at once.

Her long, wavy, dark-brown hair hung, in graceful abandon, below her waist. She was of medium height, and perfectly proportioned, while her every motion was grace itself.

"Munroe," she said, after a moment, "you are exceedingly impolite, not to say rude, to come on horseback to the door of a lady's apartment, and yell like a Comanche."

"How did you get your steed up the stairs?" she inquired, laughingly. "Oh, I forgot! We are on the road. All right, brother mine."

"Well, I anticipated a ride about old San Antonio, and you were too selfish to think of inviting me. Never mind; I'll pay you for this."

"If papa hadn't said it must be so, you would have been off without me; and where would have been my chance of seeing the Alamo?"

"Oh, how I hate a Mexican! Don't you, Munroe? But I need not ask. Tell Tom to lead my pony here. I'll join you in a moment."

"We will not see much of San Antonio, if you rattle your tongue in that fashion," growled the youth, as he spurred to the rear of the train.

He soon returned, with a sleek, raven-black pony, the same being richly equipped.

Quickly dismounting, he called out:

"Here you are, sis! 'Sashay' out here in a hurry, and don't commence to talk again, please!"

With a merry peal of laughter, the maiden sprung from the foot-board of the wagon, to the tongue, and thence to the ground; when she was assisted by her brother, into the saddle.

"By-by, papa!" she cried out; and Munroe waved his sombrero, as they both urged their animals across the plaza, and along the street leading out from it at its northeast corner. From this, they turned into a side street, leading east; soon dashing past the government hospital and commissary buildings, toward the Alamo. Thus they avoided the crush and crowd of the Main Plaza and Commerce street.

Need we say that the handsome and youthful pair were the observed of all observers, all being attracted to them; but they were not aware of this, as their own attention was fully taken up in inspecting the strange sights, which were then to be seen in the quaint Alamo City.

But it is not necessary to dwell upon their ride.

They both enjoyed it greatly, and Munroe resolved to ask his father to give him liberty to return to San Antonio, and spend a portion of the night, wishing to see the old town by moonlight. So they returned.

The train then started for the Rio Medina, the major and his son riding in advance. The latter pleaded to be allowed to return, and thoroughly inspect the town, promising to join them in camp by midnight. He finally, as we know, prevailed.

Little did either of them dream of the consequences of this; but, had Munroe continued on with the train, he and his father would have been murdered, and Mamie abducted; for the two hired assassins had seen the brother and sister start on their tour of inspection, and had recognized them.

After the departure of the wagon-train, the miscreants, knowing they could not kill the youth when with the wagons, proceeded to collect a crowd of desperate cut-throat Mexicans, along the San Pedro, in the western part of the city, and organize for an attack upon the camp; but deciding not to leave for the Medina until night.

Hence it happened, that, when Munroe galloped back to San Antonio, from the train, he was seen by Antonio Corrallo, who was fiendishly exultant; looking upon the youth's return, as an omen of luck, which promised success.

Young Moreland was closely followed by the two villains, and his experience will be given in another chapter. This will include an explanation of the occurrences which brought him into the power of the assassin, who had been bribed to take his life; also the facts connected

with the shooting of Bud Bowers, the monte-dealer.

We may here mention, that Antonio, to make sure of success, and also to be prepared, did his employers arrive, and decide to attack the wagon-camp of Major Moreland on the Rio Medina, had a large number of his lawless countrymen hired, to be on hand at call, on the Main Plaza, in small groups, and placed in such positions as to avoid notice.

All this seemed strategy of the first order.

But, this very forethought of Antonio, which, as the reader knows, proved most disastrous, and ended in wholesale death to the miscreant Greasers, explains the arrival at the Bull's Head, of a well-organized band of lawless Mexicans, who seemed, at one time, to be masters of the situation, and of that portion of the city in the vicinity of the Bull's Head.

CHAPTER VIII.

MURDER MOST FOUL.

MUNROE MORELAND had ridden back at once upon entering San Antonio the second time, to Sappington's stables, and put up his horse, stating that he should call for the animal in an hour or so before midnight.

The youth had considerable time before darkness enveloped the earth to wander about such portions of the town as he had not previously ridden through, and he made good use of his time.

He did not happen to discover the City Market until after dark, and he was greatly astonished at the immense quantity of slaughtered animals and game hanging from the huge iron hooks. It seemed to him impossible that all Texas could "get away with" such an incredible amount of meat.

A coffee and refreshment stand was near the fountain in the middle of the market, which was merely a huge roof supported by square pillars of limestone. Here Munroe sat down and ate a hearty supper, determined that he would do his part toward diminishing the stock in the market.

The Bull's Head being the nearest building, and from the doors of which shone out a blaze of light, attracted the youth's attention; and after he had eaten his supper he sauntered into the most noted monte-house in West Texas. He was followed, though he knew it not, by a Mexican who had searched far and wide on the streets for him, and only perceived him when he entered the Bull's Head. It was then too late to stab him.

Truly, Munroe's guardian angel had guided his footsteps thus far; and never would he know how near he had been, many times during the evening, to Antonio Corrillo and death!

Upon gazing with considerable curiosity into the monte-room, Munroe saw that to the right of the entrance there was a table which was nearly surrounded by Mexicans; and the peculiar expressions they used, together with their manner and costumes being strange to him, awakened in the boy a desire to study and listen to them.

The cards on the table were such as he had never before seen, and the constant changing of money and chips interested him exceedingly.

From the fact that the dealer was an American, Munroe felt perfectly at his ease, believing that he would not be considered an intruder, even though he did not wager any money on the cards.

He found a place between two Mexicans where he could lean against the edge of the table and watch the game. Being very quick to learn, he soon picked up quite a number of points in connection with Spanish monte, and learned the names of many of the peculiar cards. But all this time he took no notice of those who were betting, and was not aware that he had attracted general attention since he first came into the room.

Thus it happened that Bud Bowers, the dealer, became aware of the youth's presence, and was deeply impressed by his handsome face and figure, and his evident interest in the game.

As the two Mexicans were crowding Munroe, somewhat, and were not betting, Bud directed them to stand aside; and, with a kindly smile, said:

"Make yourself at home, my lad, and watch the game; but take my advice and never wager a dollar on Spanish monte. You're bound to lose, in the long run, and it is such a fascinating game that one cannot well break off bucking against it, once the habit is acquired. Have you recently arrived in San Antonio?"

This was said, during the shuffling of the cards.

"Yes," said Munroe, looking at the gambler in an innocent manner, which contrasted strongly with that of the others around the table; "I came in this afternoon. My father is encamped, with his train, on the Medina, and he gave me permission to return, and look around a little."

Had Munroe continued, and mentioned that he intended to return to camp before midnight, as he was about to do when Bud threw the cards to right and left of the stacks of coin—had he mentioned this fact, the words being on his lips when interrupted as described—Bud Bowers might have lived many years longer,

and perhaps died quietly in his bed, instead of in his boots; for Antonio Corrillo stood directly behind the youth, drinking in every word, and being able to understand enough English, to get the gist of the subject.

But such was not to be; and the words which would have caused the assassin to leave the Bull's Head, and secrete himself in the mesquites on the border of the road to the Rio Medina, there to await Munroe's coming—these words were never spoken.

Upon what fragile hinges swing the doors of death!

What trifling incidents, what trivial words, change the whole lives of some of us; change joy to grief, or grief to joy; plunge us upon a headlong rush to death, or transport us into the seventh heaven of delight and real life!

"And you like San Antonio thus far, do you, my boy?" asked Bud, again shuffling the cards.

"I do, indeed," was the reply. "Everything and everybody seem strange and interesting here."

"One who has always lived in Eastern Texas, does not have the slightest idea of real Texas life. There, it is pretty much as in the older Southern States. This is like another world to me."

Had Munroe glanced behind him, and seen Corrillo, whose hand clutched the handle of his knife, and whose eyes flashed hatred, born of the fact that Bowers had taken an interest in his intended victim, which might balk his plans—had he seen the assassin, he would have been forced to acknowledge that he was in danger of fathoming the mysteries of another world indeed.

Twice had the Mexican walked out to the bar, and tossed off a large drink of brandy, and he was now, with the effects of the liquor and his fury, observing indications, which delayed, if not prevented, his plans altogether.

Doubtless the assassin would have acted differently had he not taken so much brandy.

As it was, he had grown desperate, and was resolved on a bold game.

"You speak truly, my lad; but people from the 'States' are rather slow in admitting it."

"Ace and queen! Senors, make your bets, and I'll pull for the money, and another 'lay-out.' Queen in the 'door.' Ace and Jack are both favorite cards."

Bud had replied to Munroe. Then, as he ceased shuffling the cards were cut, and he gave a "lay-out," speaking on, as he called the cards, in the way we have seen.

This was unusual with him, when Mexicans were the only betters around the table.

But Bud Bowers spoke unconsciously, for his mind was not on his game. He had detected the murderous look of Antonio Corrillo, directed upon the young stranger, and the nervous clutching of the villain's fingers about the butt of his revolver, and the handle of his knife.

To say that Bud was surprised would be "putting it mild." He was astounded.

Here was a young lad, just arrived in the town—a stranger, who had no acquaintance probably in San Antonio, especially with Mexicans—being watched, with evidently murderous intent, by one who was known to be a desperate and lawless cut-throat.

For, he well knew that the officers and scouts were, at that very time, watching to get proofs sufficient to fasten some one of the many crimes, which all felt sure that Antonio Corrillo had committed, upon him.

There was little time for thought, however; for the dastardly Greaser had arrived at such a desperate and murderous state, that to longer delay action was torture unendurable.

Touching the American youth on the shoulder, the assassin striving to banish all rage and desperation from his face, and to appear calm and friendly, but without succeeding, the villain said, abruptly:

"Senorito Moreland, come! *Vamonos!* Your father is waiting for you on the Medina. You must go to camp."

Munroe, who had whirled about, as the hand of the Mexican touched his shoulder, was filled with the utmost astonishment at the words of the Greaser. Especially was this so, at the unexpected source of them.

But, instantly he recollected that many Mexicans lived on the Rio Medina, and that possibly some accident had happened to the wagon-train—it might be to Mamie—and he started to leave the table.

At that moment, the boy's arm was grasped by Bud Bowers, who cried out:

"Hold on a second, my lad! Do you know that Mexican?"

An expression of the most murderous fury contorted the face of Antonio Corrillo. He became positively fiendish in appearance.

The youth at once replied:

"No, indeed! I never saw the man before; but he tells me that my father wants me. Besides, he knows my name."

"So it appears," said Bud, dryly.

"But surely something must have happened," persisted the boy.

"Something will happen, my lad, if you go with that miscreant. He has been about town

all the afternoon, and here in this room ever since you have been present.

"He speaks of your father—he lies!"

"He has not been to the Medina, I tell you. He seeks your life. He is an assassin!"

"Stand aside, boy! Jump! Jump for your life!"

As Bud Bowers spoke, he leaned forward, over the monte-table, and pushed Munroe aside quickly; while, at the same moment, the report of a revolver sounded terrifically through the room.

Bud had saved the youth, as he intended, but the bullet had entered the gambler's shoulder.

He straightened up as much as was possible, and clutched his revolver; the Mexicans stampeding for the door, like so many frightened sheep.

Before Bowers could bring his weapon to a level, he being faint from his wound, Antonio Corrillo, with a beast-like snarl, thrust his pistol within two feet of the monte-dealer's head, and fired.

There was another flash, followed by another sounding report.

Brave Bud Bowers fell prone across his table, over the gold, and silver, and chips, with a bullet through his brain!

Without a gasp, there he lay, stone dead—his life sacrificed in the attempt to save the life of a stranger!

Appalled, his blood chilled, dazed and almost paralyzed—thus, for an instant, stood young Munroe Moreland.

Then, out his revolver was jerked; but with the fury of a fiend, Antonio hurled the youth to the floor, and sprung astride of him.

This was the scene that met the eye of Dandy Dave, as detailed in a previous chapter, when the report of the pistol and the shriek that followed, drew the young Texan to the Bull's Head.

CHAPTER IX.

VICTORY FOR THE RIGHT.

SILENCE ruled in the monte-room.

For a moment, the half-dozen Mexicans gazed into the eyes of the Texans.

None crooked finger to pull trigger.

The scene was terrible.

Then sounded the fierce yells of the Texans on the street, as they caught sight of the Mexicans running for life, down toward the foot-bridge, at the river.

This sound seemed to break the terrible spell, that had frozen the Greasers in the monte-room, in their tracks. With a loud cry one more daring than the others, thrust forward his "six-shooter," and pulled trigger; but the report was drowned by the simultaneous explosion of the revolvers of the Texans who had received their orders from Dandy Dave.

Not one of the Greasers had been wounded in a mortal part. Hands had been shattered, ere they could pull trigger. Knives had fallen from fingers, that had been torn through by the leaden balls. Ears had been torn, and limbs perforated; but that was all.

But the Texans noticed not their work; for, at the very moment the deafening report rung out, Munroe Moreland fell, as if stricken with death, at the feet of Dandy Dave!

With a groan of anguish, Dave quickly sunk to his knees, thrust his revolver in the scabbard, and raised the head and shoulders of the youth from the floor.

A tiny stream of blood flowed over temple and cheek. All the Texans gathered around.

"Run for the water and brandy, pards, quick! I had rather have been shot myself. There has been crooked business mixed in here. But I'll sift the matter—see if I don't!"

"He ain't a-goin' ter pass his chips jist yit, pard Dave," replied one of the Texans, who had been examining the boy's head; "fac' air, he'll be hunk in a few fletin' periods."

"I believe you are right, Bill," said Dave, much relieved. "It was a glance shot."

At that instant, two rancheros came running from the bar, with brandy and a mug of water. Dandy Dave immediately poured the water over Munroe's head and face and into his mouth. He then administered a small dose of the brandy, rubbing some of the liquor upon the wound.

The youth soon opened his eyes.

"Boys!" yelled Dandy Dave; "hustle those Greasers out into the street. They are kicking up too much of a rumpus, and there are some of our pards out in front—I reckon Bob Caille led them here—who, as they didn't take a hand in the game, won't be satisfied unless they are invited to a lynch picnic. We must do our best."

"Run them out, and make sure that Antonio doesn't escape! I want a word with him myself. One of you ask Bob Caille to take charge of the bank of poor Bud Bowers, or send Crazy Nace in."

With a Texan at each arm, the Mexicans were dragged, shrieking in terror and agony, out through the bar to the street.

One wild yell of mad joy rung out from Caille's party, as Corrillo was discovered.

The face of Antonio was corpse-like, and his eyes filled with despair. Well the wretch knew that his race was run—that he was doomed to an ignominious death!

Long had the citizens of San Antonio, and the rancheros in its vicinity, sought to fasten some of the many crimes this miscreant had committed, as they confidently believed, upon him; but, so cunning was he, that proofs were always wanting to convict him.

There were few who believed him what he pretended to be—that is, a purchaser of Spanish mares in Mexico, which he sold in Texas.

Many felt assured that Antonio was a spy for the bandits of the Rio Grande.

Now, that he had shown his hand, all knew, and were satisfied as to his true character.

While the Texans were dragging the maimed and shrieking wretches from the monte-room, Munroe Moreland lay, having partially recovered consciousness, his eyes fixed upon Dandy Dave, who attended on him.

The wounded youth appeared not to hear the shrieks of the Greasers, or to comprehend his own position or condition.

Munroe did not seem to recognize Dave, or to recall the near past; but his eyes soon assumed a more natural look.

"How do you find yourself?" asked Dave. "Where are your friends? You are not, certainly, alone in San Antonio?"

No answer was returned by the youth.

Dandy Dave was greatly worried.

He gazed around the monte-room, and found himself and the boy alone with the body of the murdered Bud Bowers.

The young Texan could scarce repress a shudder as he took in the scene.

In the passage lay a heap of slain Greasers—a terrible sight—their arms and legs entwined and twisted in the death-struggle, and all a mass of gore. Their hideous heads projected, with sightless eyes and distorted features; all beyond the power to do more cowardly and murderous deeds.

Yet the sight of them did not seem to impress Dandy Dave, as did that of the corpse upon the table; for his gaze returned to the dead gambler, as if fascinated.

Very natural, horribly so, when the circumstances were considered, was the murdered man positioned. He seemed to be, even in death, guarding his effects; while Dave fancied that a threatening and defiant look shot from the soulless eyes.

Again the fancy struck Dave that Bud had staked his life as well as his bank upon a card, and had lost; but as the bullet sped to his brain, he had resolved to pay but half the wager. His life might go, but not his gold. So, even in death he would conceal his treasure, and keep it from the grasp of the winner.

By a powerful effort of the will, Dandy Dave threw off his strange imaginings, and the indescribable and unaccountable influence that the corpse had held upon his mind; and taking Munroe Moreland in his strong arms, he strode from the monte-room, passed around the hideous heap of dead Mexicans, and through the bar to the open air.

He thought that the cool atmosphere would revive the youth who had, in a very short time—although he could not explain how or why it was—become of great interest to him.

Dandy Dave had never in his life felt as he had this night. No scene had ever so impressed him as had that upon the gambling-table.

It was not strange, perhaps, that the corpse of the monte-dealer, placed as has been described, had strangely affected Dave, strong and healthy borderman as he was and accustomed to wild and fearful sights; for it would have chained the attention and impressed strongly the mind of a man with the most iron nerve, and a heart devoid of all feeling for the misery and agony of another.

It was in no way strange, either, that the young man should be favorably impressed by the brave and handsome youth whom he had saved from death; impressed to the extent of mentally swearing eternal friendship.

For Munroe was almost feminine in appearance, and yet had proved himself most daring and recklessly brave during the brief space of time that Dave had been in the monte-room.

Even when the knife of the assassin was about to be plunged into his heart, Dave had noticed that not a trace of fear was manifested by the youth, but that Munroe gazed unflinchingly and defiantly into the eyes of his would-be murderer, struggling until pale from weakness to free his arms and save his own life, although hopeless of so doing.

Few were there of the age of Munroe Moreland—which could not be more than sixteen—who would not have screamed in the very extremity of terror, if in like position of deadly peril.

These qualities were the very ones to attract a man like Dandy Dave; and they created in him a strong feeling of friendship for the boy, and a desire to protect his strangely-discovered protege.

Besides this it seemed to Dave that matters had become known to him accidentally, when two hundred miles distant, and which he had thought of little consequence at the time—they having been forgotten, and only recalled when

the mob shouted the name of Antonio Corrillo—which now, connected with the attempted assassination of the youth, forced Dave to decide that his future to some extent, at least, must be woven with, or devoted to Munroe Moreland, and those who were near and dear to him.

Such thoughts and conclusions ruled the mind of Dandy Dave, as he strode from the outer side-door, and along the walk opposite the City Market, toward the Main Plaza. Here, a new scene was encountered.

Upon the plaza was a crowd of Texans, and the shrieks of agony from that direction proved that the mutilated miscreants were in the midst of those vengeful citizens, rancheros, rangers, and teamsters.

The bright silvery moon showed the young man and his burden to the Texans, and then, out on the night air came shouted the words from Bob Caile:

"Oh, yes! O-o-o-oh, yes! O-o-o-oh, yes! Dandy Dave! You're wanted. Come into court!"

CHAPTER X.

THE HAZARD OF A DIE.

ALL except the most timid men in the Alamo City had been drawn to the Bull's Head by the reports of the pistols, and consequently there was a large crowd in the Main Plaza. But not a Mexican could be seen.

All the Greasers knew full well that the volcano of wrath and fury had burst forth against them, and threatened an eruption.

There were, it was true, honest and law-abiding Mexicans in San Antonio; but these men prudently held themselves aloof when outlaw Mexicans were captured. For, in such cases, they put themselves in great danger.

So it was on the night in question.

But such is far from being the state of society in San Antonio at the present time.

Dandy Dave hastened his walk, not answering the peculiar but common salutation of Bob Caile, the proprietor at that time of the Bull's Head.

Much to the surprise of Dave, as he reached the plaza, Munroe Moreland revived, opening his eyes and looking up at the star-studded heavens for a moment in bewilderment, and then into the face of his rescuer. In another moment he spoke:

"Did I hear them call you Dandy Dave?"

"That is the handle the boys have hitherto me, little pard. But, how do you feel? I am glad to see you are yourself again."

"Did you know that you were shot by a Greaser in that monte-room? Luckily the bullet glanced along your skull."

"You had a close call, Munroe—not more than a sixteenth of an inch from certain death, I can tell you."

"No; I had no idea what had happened. I have had strange feelings and have been unable until now to think. As to the 'close call,' I am certain I could have been no nearer death than when you shot the knife from that Mexican as he was about to stab me."

"I feel quite well now, thank you! Please allow me to walk. I owe you my life, and I shall not forget the debt."

"You owe me nothing, my boy. Do you think yourself strong enough to walk? I was just going to carry you to Doc Reed's drug-store and get you fixed straight."

"Oh, yes! I'm all right, I reckon, and I don't care to have those men see you carry me about like a baby."

"Well done! But there's not much of the baby about you. That I'll swear to on a stack of Bibles. There, take my arm!"

"We have biz on hand which I don't think you will care to look upon. We are going to lynch the Mexicans; the one who shot you, and Antonio, who tried to knife you, among the number. You won't enjoy the picnic to any extent, will you?"

"I don't reckon I shall feel very bad to see them strung up a limb," said the boy. "To confess the truth, I really believe I shall enjoy seeing those miscreants hung, if they are all like the one that shot the monte-dealer in so cowardly a manner."

"I took quite a liking to Bud, and but for me he would be alive now. It was he who prevented that Greaser from enticing me away."

"You must tell the whole story to the boys, and I want to know it myself. I intend to pump Antonio before he is strung up a limb. But here we are, little pard!"

Munroe was now upon his feet, but still holding Dandy Dave by the arm, as they walked toward the crowd on the plaza.

The Texans gave a yell of welcome as they came up, and then turned to the very serious business that they had on hand.

The mutilated Mexicans had ceased to make the faintest outcry, satisfied that no rescue would be attempted; or, if it were, that it would be of no benefit to them. A regiment of lancers could not have charged that crowd of determined Texans without being shot from their horses before they reached a point where their weapons would prove effective.

"Well, Dave!" shouted Bob Caile, "where shall we hold our picnic this time?"

"I reckon the old mesquite, on the Military Plaza, won't hold up this batch!"

"You're right," was the reply; "we must take them down the river. It would be too terrible a spectacle, mutilated as they are, to hang them on the plaza; even if the old mesquite could stand the pressure."

"That tree must not be broken. It has served the State, and this burg in particular, too well, to be burdened too heavily. Two men can, and often have been choked off from its limbs at once, without causing a branch to crack; but that number ought to be the limit. So that settles it."

"Down river, to the pecans, I say! Speak, boys! Are you all agreed to that?"

"Down river!"

"String 'em all on one percorn!"

"Hurra-a-ah fer Dandy Dave!"

"Hurra-a-ah fer ther leetle piert pilgrim!"

"Trot ther Greasers erlong—dog-gone 'em!"

"Whoop 'em up lively, boyees!"

These and other such cries filled the air, and the surging crowd moved down the street which led from the southeast corner of the Main Plaza, and toward the river.

The bottom, below the city, was composed, for the most part, of pecan trees; the nuts from which are an article of commerce, and sold in all parts of the United States.

The moans and groans of the wounded Mexicans were continuous, and would have been agonizing in the ears of any who did not know of their merciless nature, and the fiendish crimes committed by their class. Indeed, any who had not witnessed their brutal and cowardly murders could not have refrained from having sympathy and pity for the miserable wretches.

But no such mercy was in the hearts of the Texans, who surrounded them; or, if it perhaps existed in the breasts of some, it was not expressed, either by word or look.

Had the attention of the Texans been centered upon their captives, and upon the approach of Dandy Dave and Munroe Moreland when on the Main Plaza, some of them might have noticed two horsemen, walking their steeds down the street from the southeast corner of the Military Plaza to the opposite one of the Main Plaza; where, keeping close to the side of the old post-office, they peered around the corner of the same, upon the crowd.

This was dangerous for the night-riders, especially at that time; their manner and actions being very suspicious, and an idea of anything like "crookedness" being suspected by the infuriated Texans, would have caused immediate and thorough inspection of the strangers.

But, it was evident that they felt safe; that they well knew they could escape before horses could be procured to pursue them, if discovered by the citizens.

It would also have been evident, to any one observing them, that they were intensely interested in the proceedings of the lynchers. Had not this been the case, they would not thus have risked themselves in the plainly apparent character of spies.

Could one have looked into their faces, he would have at once decided, that they had a strong object in viewing the mob of Texans—an object upon which life depended—for their faces showed signs of fear and anxiety.

Had they been in the moonlight, discovery would have been certain; but a large tree, on the corner of the plaza, with thick green foliage, shaded them and their animals.

When, however, the outcries of the lynchers betrayed the fact that the Mexicans were to be taken down the river; then the two horsemen turned their beasts, and keeping them at a slow walk, gained the Military Plaza. Then they turned the first street to their left, and galloped headlong in a southerly direction.

Thus, until beyond the more closely built dwellings, they rode. Then they forced their horses to bound over a fence, and speed east toward the San Antonio river; gaining a hiding-place among the mesquites, near which they decided that the lynchers would select the spot for their work of vengeance.

Both of these men were Americans, evidently Texans, and both were villainous and treacherous characters, if faces mirror the mind and soul.

They were dressed as Texan rancheros, and well mounted upon superb horses; both the animals being plainly marked for speed.

The face of one was broad, red, and somewhat bloated. The other was sharp visaged, and his skin almost cadaverous.

"Hang them!" exclaimed the last mentioned; "they will blow on us! They'll give us away, if they get a chance before they are choked off. I know them infernal Greasers."

"They'll tell their little story, out of revenge upon us for bringing them to their death. But, by the Eternal, I'll blow the brains out of Antonio, before he can 'peach,' if I risk my life in doing it!"

"More than life depends upon their death."

"You take Pedro Galindo, Bob, and I'll settle Antonio's biz. Don't make a miss. Then drive spurs, as soon as you pull trigger; for lead

will fly thick here, in two skips after the report of our rifles!"

"Don't you fret," returned the other; "I'll send a ball through Pedro's brain. Look steady, and watch closely. Here they come, and not a horse in the party!"

"We've got the deadwood on success in this biz, and a clean get away— 'S-s-sh!"

The reader knows, as a matter of course, that these night-riders were Lance Lanewood and Bob Barnes, who, upon arriving in San Antonio, and learning of the fight in the Bull's Head, and the intended lynching, knew at once that their tools had made a "botch" of the work; that the plot, in respect to Munroe's assassination had failed, and that, in consequence, all was lost.

But that was not all.

They, themselves, were liable to be hanged, did Pedro and Antonio "peach;" and this, they undoubtedly would do, in their rage at being brought to an ignominious death, through the means of perfidious Americans, whose gold had been the means of ending their life-trail.

At once, the affrighted pair determined to risk everything, even life itself, rather than allow the Mexicans to reveal the names of their employers, and the further details of the plot.

The reader already knows that the two cowardly villains watched the mob, from the corner of the post-office, and then galloped to the mesquites, by the bottom-timber of the Rio San Antonio.

CHAPTER XI.

THE PLOT THICKENS.

SOON the mob of Texans reached the river-bottom, and immediately seven laria's were thrown over as many limbs of a huge pecan tree. Upon one end of each lariat was tied an easy slipping noose, and the opposite end was held by ready hands.

The doomed wretches, when the deadly nooses swayed beside their heads, shrunk and shuddered as if in contact with serpents.

Prayers and curses came from their trembling lips, in their agony and terror. Some of them, however, gazed defiantly at their executioners, not betraying in any way what they suffered; displaying the fortitude they had inherited from their Indian ancestors.

Munroe Moreland had, during the walk from the Main Plaza, assisted by Dandy Dave, seen enough of the Mexicans to cause him to become weak and faint; his wound, and the loss of blood, tending somewhat to bring about this state. Consequently, he said, as they all neared the timber:

"Dandy Dave, I don't care to witness this. I will turn into the mesquites, and lie down until all is over, if you will kindly excuse me."

"Most certainly," returned Dave; "I don't care to witness it myself, but it is my duty to the community, to assist in ridding the country of such miscreants. You and I will exchange confidences presently. We have met under peculiar circumstances, and there is something in my mind which causes me to believe that it was a fortunate meeting, in more ways than one."

"But your evidence will not be necessary here. Those dastards are doomed without it."

"By the way, of how many does your party consist, and where are they at present?"

"I do not ask this out of idle curiosity, but because I am convinced they are in danger. I have overheard something which I believe to have deep significance in connection with your family."

"My father is Major Maurice Moreland. I have an only sister, Mamie; and our mother is dead."

"Father is encamped on the Rio Medina, some twelve miles from here. My sister is with him."

"His intention is to start a ranch on the Leona river, I believe. That Mexican villain endeavored to prevail on me to leave the Bull's Head in his company, but Bud Bowers prevented me."

"All right, my boy! I may go to your camp to-night. I see that I have been correct in my suspicions. That miscreant was hired to assassinate you, and your father and sister are in danger. I can explain no more at this time."

"Trust to me, and have no anxiety. We will defeat the villains. I'll be with you directly."

Without waiting to give Munroe a chance to speak, Dandy Dave rushed from the mesquites and darted toward the crowd of Texans.

Munroe was speechless. The words of Dandy Dave had greatly alarmed him. It was evident that the young Texan had in some way become aware of a danger that threatened him and his.

This was puzzling, but the boy knew that Antonio had striven to murder him, and that one of the survivors of the terrible volley in the dark passage had picked him out as an especial target.

It was all strange and unaccountable, yet the youth could not doubt that Dave had spoken truly. He had mentioned also the strange influence which had ruled him and caused him to

visit the Bull's Head, in place of retiring to rest.

These words of Dave were destined to be recalled most forcibly to mind by Munroe Moreland.

The wounded and weary youth had cast himself upon the sward beneath the branches of the thick mesquites, which grew out from the same spot in the earth, a score at least in number.

He had sprung to a sitting posture when the strange and impressive words of Dandy Dave had been spoken; but when the young man had departed Munroe again sunk to the earth, his mind filled with a whirl of anxious thoughts.

Fierce whoops and yells now rung through the bottom-timber. Munroe judged that Dave had reached the point selected for the lynching.

Then followed a dead silence.

He now felt assured that Dandy Dave was keeping his word—that is, "pumping" the two Greasers who had attempted his assassination.

Would they reveal anything, when they could gain nothing by so doing? It did not seem probable, judging from what he had seen of Mexican character. They must feel that they were doomed as it was, and they would say nothing.

The recent assertions of Dave had awakened a deep interest in Munroe's mind, and he was impatient to learn more. His imagination was rendered wild and unnatural from his wound; and to picture up the hanging would be worse than the reality, did he allow his mind to dwell upon it.

Who was there, in the wide world, who would have any object in wronging his father, his sister, or himself? This was a question that Munroe could not answer in his mind. He did not believe that there could be any one. But there was one thing.

His father had not given any definite reason for disposing of their old plantation on the Rio Brazos, and removing, with his family, to the border.

Might not this have some connection with the plot, a knowledge of which Dandy Dave had mysteriously gained? He must think.

But the boy's train of thought was suddenly interrupted by the sound of horses' hoofs coming near, seemingly in a stealthy manner, the point nearest to the scene of the execution.

A moment of listening convinced Munroe that there were two horses, and that both were held in check, controlled by riders.

They passed quite near to him.

He could see that they were Americans.

They spoke in English, consequently they could not be bent upon a rescue. Yet they were evidently anxious to avoid discovery.

Did this bode danger to Dandy Dave?

It might, indeed. Certainly there was evidence of another startling event yet to come.

The new-comers meant mischief, perhaps murder.

Who was to be their victim?

Instantly Munroe decided to investigate. It might be in his power to save the life of the one who had rescued him from the jaws of death.

The night-riders were spies at all events, and he would spy upon them. That much was justifiable.

The boy crawled along for some distance and then raised himself to his feet with the help of a mesquite bush; for he was weak from his wound, as well as from the continuous excitement.

But, no sooner had he gained a standing posture, than he uttered a groan, and shuddered from head to foot: for the startling report of two rifles rung in front of him, reverberating on the air, and echoing through the natural arches of the bottom-timber near at hand.

Close following this terrific and unexpected sound, there arose from the crowd of Texans, a series of whoops and yells of insane rage and vengeful meaning. A vocal pandemonium ruled the vicinity for some time.

Munroe Moreland stood, dumfounded.

He clutched the mesquites for support, fearing that Dandy Dave had been slain. But his tongue clave to the roof of his mouth, his eyes started, in most terrible amazement and consternation; as, past his covert, dashed two horsemen—two assassins without doubt—their faces brutal, villainous, and stamped with exultation and satisfied revenge.

Plying spurs without mercy, the night-riders crashed headlong through the mesquites, southward, regardless of the torturing thorns.

The first thought, as Munroe heard the two horsemen approach was, that they might be connected with the plot against his family; and, if so, and if they had bribed the miscreant Mexicans to kill him, they would naturally attempt to shoot the Greasers, before the latter could betray them, as their employers, to the Texan avengers. This seemed a very possible solution of the mystery of their appearance.

But no sooner were the faces of the two men revealed to Munroe, in the bright moonlight—although they did not perceive the youth—than the latter was affected as has been recorded. And it was little wonder.

No longer was the object of the plot a mystery; for, in one of the horsemen, he recognized

an uncle whom he had not seen for years—an unprincipled villain, and a criminal of the deepest dye, who had been ordered from the home of Munroe's father, nearly two years previous, for an atrocious assault upon a lady visitor at the plantation. He had then, the boy remembered, sworn revenge.

This miscreant was his father's only brother, and Munroe was surprised at not having recalled the man and his oath of vengeance, when Dandy Dave had mentioned that enemies were plotting danger, perhaps death, against the Moreland family.

Now he knew that his villainous uncle would not hesitate at any crime in the calendar.

He had hired an assassin to murder him, which proved that he would also seek the life of his father, and degrade or condemn Mamie to a fate worse than death; banishing her forever from friends and home. He was equal to this, and he now sought to do it.

The object was but too plainly evident; in fact, there was a double object, for this uncle would be the nearest of kin when his brother and the two children had been removed.

This all flashed through Munroe Moreland's weakened brain, rendered more—yes, doubly terrible and appalling—by that weakness.

He reeled and trembled, his face ghastly; then, as he recalled the fact that the two villainous plotters had galloped toward the Rio Medina, where his unsuspecting father and sister were now encamped, the boy felt, in all its intensity, his utter helplessness.

With a low moan of dread anguish, Munroe Moreland fell senseless to the earth!

CHAPTER XII.

THE LAST RELIEF.

WHEN Dandy Dave joined the lynchers in the San Antonio bottom-timber, he had in his mind a strong determination to force from Antonio Corrallo and Pedro Galindo the facts connected with the work they had been bribed to do.

It was pretty certain that Pedro had been waiting outside the Bull's Head for the coming of his pard, Antonio, with the boy, Munroe Moreland.

Bud Bowers had met his death, for having advised the youth not to leave the monte-room.

However, knowing the character of the Greasers as he did, Dandy Dave had little hope of success in gaining the desired information. But, suddenly a new idea entered his mind.

He would imbitter the minds of the two Mexicans against the man who had bribed them, and cause the miscreants to believe that they had been deceived and betrayed by their employers.

Dave was confident that Pedro and Antonio had been in Port Lavaca when he was there, but he did not believe that they had seen him; consequently he could, with good grounds, speak in such a manner as would weaken them in their loyalty to their employers, if not to convince them that they had been made tools of, to be betrayed by those who had hired them.

There would not be much reason in all this, but the ignorant Mexicans, in the state of mind in which they were, might in their rage believe every word of it, and in retaliation reveal the names and object of the villains who were conspiring against Major Moreland and his family.

Thus resolved, Dandy Dave stole directly through the crowd, to the spot where Antonio and Pedro stood, both weak and trembling from loss of blood, and with the deadly nooses about their necks.

The Texans made way for Dave, crying out as he came within the circle:

"'Rah fer Dandy Dave!"

"How air ther younker, pard Dandy?" asked one.

"We'll fotch ther boyee 'round, O. K., 'fore soon."

"Whoop-la! Ther circus air 'bout ter begin. Tight-rope performance fu'st on ther p'o-gramme!"

"This hyer show hev bin hangin' fire 'bout long enough. Stiff laria's air on ther bill-o'-fare."

"String 'em up, pards!"

"Give 'em an up'ard glide!"

"Check 'em through, C. O. D., over ther brimstun range, on ther cyclone whiz!"

Such were the yells that rung out on all sides. A fire had been hastily kindled under the tree, and the flames lit up the scene in all its dread details.

Dandy Dave raised his hand to indicate that he wished silence, and all became at once still as death: proving the great influence the young scout held over these rough men.

"Now, Antonio Corrallo and Pedro Galindo," said Dave, in a stern and clear voice, as he halted directly opposite the two Mexicans, who presented a sight that was horrible to witness; "I wish a few words with you before you leave the world which you have cursed."

"You must soon answer for your inhuman crimes. There are a score of cowardly murderers you must suffer for; and had I not ar-

rived in San Antonio when I did, an innocent youth, and others with him, would have been assassinated.

"You little thought that Dandy Dave was on your trail, and that I had collected evidence against you sufficient to hang a dozen men."

"You have known me long as one who has sworn war against all who break the laws of God and man; and when I prove to you that I know more than you think—that I have been on your trail even to the Mexique Gulf—then you will realize that there is never any escape from justice for such as you."

"You accepted a bribe from men in Port Lavaca—men whose nearest relative had been slain in the Mexican war, and they had sworn to have revenge upon all Greasers."

Dave was romancing here for a purpose of his own.

"They knew that if you attempted to assassinate young Moreland you would get your crowd into a tight box, and time has proved they were correct."

"What say you now? Do you see the trap you were so easily led into?"

This was spoken by Dandy Dave in Spanish; and as he proceeded, the faces of the Mexicans, especially of Antonio and Pedro, became absolutely fiendish in expression. They realized that they had been duped, for they "swallowed the bait."

There they stood, blood-stained, with their gore-matted and long, tangled black hair and demon faces, their set teeth grinding with rage, despair and pain. Such was the fearful picture, lighted up by the fire and framed by the crescent of vengeful Texans, holding in their hands the fatal lariats and awaiting the word of command.

When Dandy Dave had ceased speaking, he stood with folded arms gazing into the repulsive faces of the hired assassins, while the Texans longed for the signal to pull on the lariats.

Antonio, with a great effort, straightened up, and gathered what strength he had remaining, as he yelled:

"Curses upon the doubloons of the Gringos! The gold pays not for our blood. *El diablo* burn forever those perfidious senors of Porto Lavaca! If I had them here I'd tear their hearts out with my teeth!"

And the Mexican seemed, at that moment, fully capable of carrying out his threat.

Dandy Dave saw that now was the time to "strike," and he did, and quickly.

"The men who hired you shall hang, too—I swear it, Antonio! You shall be avenged, villain though you are. What are their names?"

The Greaser detected not the ruse. He saw not that he had been deceived; that, if Dave had followed him to Lavaca and knew of the plot, as he had asserted, he must also know who were the two Americans who had bribed him and Pedro.

With a fierce glitter in his black eye, his desire for revenge, even after death, crowding back the agony that he suffered, Antonio yelled, in a most unearthly voice:

"Hang them as you will me, Dandy Dave, and I call on all the saints, with my latest breath, to bless you! They are at the Menger Hotel by this time, or they will come to-morrow. They swore they would, but it may be a lie. Anyway, they are at Porto Lavaca, or they were, and their names are—"

Antonio Corrallo never spoke another word.

At that instant, the startling report of two rifles, fired as one, rung out on the night air, and the forms of Pedro and Antonio sunk suddenly; only upheld by the lariats about their necks—the Texans having the opposite ends held taut in their hands.

In the center of each of the foreheads of the two Mexicans was a circular hole, of the size of a forty-four caliber rifle, and a bluish border around the same.

Neither of them had known what hurt them. Their sufferings were soon over.

They had escaped death by the rope, but their torture previous to death had been terrible indeed.

For a moment, all, except Dandy Dave, stood in their tracks, gazing in amazement toward the mesquites.

"Run them up, and follow me, boys!"

Thus cried the young scout as he bounded, revolver in hand, toward the belt of mesquites, above which curled two little coils of smoke.

The remaining miscreants now realized that their time had come at last.

With wild whoops and yells, the Texans jerked the wretches up, free from the ground, and half-way between it and the limbs. They then made fast the slack of the lariats to the trunk of the pecan tree.

This done, all, in a mad mob, rushed on in the direction of the mesquites, weapons in hand; eager for the blood of those who had interfered with their "lynch picnic"—the insulters, as they held them, of justice and civilization.

And, to the pecan limbs, twitching and drawing up their tortured forms, in the agonies of strangulation, hung the five Mexican assassins; the corpses of their more favored comrades,

Antonio and Pedro, swaying slowly—the dead having been jerked upward with the living.

It was a sight too horrible to look upon, and we will not further dwell upon it.

It is almost needless to mention that, in asking the names of the plotters, Dandy Dave but wished that all present might have proofs against the right parties, as he himself well knew the miscreants to be Lancelot Lanewood and Bob Barnes.

CHAPTER XIII.

ON A LONE TRAIL.

WHEN Dandy Dave reached the mesquites, he dropped upon his knees and ran his fingers over the sward, almost instantly becoming convinced that the concealed men who had fired the rifles had been mounted and thus had placed themselves beyond capture.

Placing his ear to the earth, Dave heard the far-off thuds of hoofs on the sward, indicating that the night-riders were galloping at full speed.

All at once it occurred to him that he had left young Moreland quite near the track of the strange horsemen, and he called out:

"Munroe! oh, Munroe! where are you?"

No answer came, and the young Texan became filled with anxiety and apprehension.

Just then the crowd rushed up, yelling:

"Whar air ther condemned skunks?"

"Drag out ther bushwhackers!"

"Whoop 'em out, an' we'll string 'em up 'longside ther yaller coyotes yunder!"

Dave heeded not these cries. His own voice came ringing out, loud and clear:

"The spies have escaped, boys! It is no use to hunt them, for they are mounted."

"Search the mesquites for young Moreland. Perhaps the ruffians have killed the boy. He hasn't answered when I called to him."

"Spread out and search, all hands!"

This was said in a rapid and excited manner, and it had its effect.

The Texans rushed hither and thither through the mesquites; soon, however, being called together by the rallying whoop of Dandy Dave, which proved that the latter had discovered Munroe.

Soon after all were gathered around the pair, who had been brought so strangely together, and who were fated to pass through many startling and terrible scenes, before another sun bathed the prairies in its golden light.

"Boys," said Dave, "the young fellow is all right. I thought they had killed him, but I do not believe they saw him. He was very weak and faint when I left here, and he probably heard the rifles, thought we were being shot down, and rushed to ascertain the facts of the case. It was too much for the little fellow, and he wilted."

"But he'll be all right before long. I'll carry him to the river and bathe his head."

"Dang an' double dang me ef ther younker ain't a-gittin' billious biz shoved onter him red-hot an' purty thick for a fresh on ther frontier, in his fust night's 'vestergate!"

Thus spoke one of the rancheros.

"He's a game leetle rooster," said another, "an' carries his gaffs handy when he is hisself, an' he'll carve an' shoot when hit's needcessary."

"Two on 'em, war thar, pard Bill?" inquired one of the ex-rangers.

"Ya-as, thar war a couple, an' they know'd how ter pint shootin' irons, es yer all seed. Dang'd ef hit ain't sorter mixed biz all 'roun'! I doesn't undercomstan' things. My idees air on a whirligig stompede."

Dandy Dave had, when he last spoke suited his actions to his words, and carried Munroe to the river, nearly all the Texans following.

One of those, who had followed the trail of the horsemen, where the mesquites were less thick, and the moon shone down between, returned in time to hear the last speaker, and he hastened to state the result of his investigations.

"Hit's no mixed 'rangement 't all, Bill! Ther condemned cowardly shooters heerd every word Antone spoke, an' shut him off with a bullet through his brain-box, jist es he war goin' ter sling ther names o' ther or'nary white trash what hed hired 'em ter wipe out ther younker et ther Bull's Head. Hit's all plain enough."

"Dang'd ef they didn't happen 'roun' jist et ther right minnit, ter put a stopper on ther gab-tackle o' ther cussed, or'nary Greaser!"

"Cuss my cats, ef they didn't, pard!" agreed another. "But come on, boyees! Thar's nothin' ter be made hyer-a-ways. Le's see how ther leetle pilgrim air pergressin'. Cuss my canterlopes, ef I didn't cotton ter ther boy, fust time I friz my peepers onter him!"

The others followed the last speaker, through the mesquites, and toward the pecan with its ghastly burdens, which were still slowly swaying.

"Ther bushwhackers kinder sp'iled ther bestest part o' our lynch picnic," grumbled one.

"Dog-gone ther yeller skunks! They've done all ther cussedness they'll ever do, an' they're gittin' a lively fandango now, I opine."

The speaker and his companions passed on to

the river-bank, where the main portion of the party were congregated, gazing at Dandy Dave.

The latter was now bathing the head of Munroe Moreland; the youth seeming to be in a semi-comatose state. His eyes were open, and his breath coming and going faintly; but there did not appear to be any more intelligence in his fixed orbs, than in those of a corpse. Dave was sad and perplexed.

"I can't stand this, boys," he said. "The little fellow must have been struck harder than we thought. He was trying to bear up, but the effort was too much for him."

"Then those bushwhackers came near riding him down, and he must have thought the devil was to pay again, and that some of us had been shot. He never could have imagined the true state of the case."

"Come on back to town, boys! I'll leave him at the Plaza House, call Doc Reed to attend him, and then light out to the Medina."

"This plucky little fellow came to town to get the run of San Antonio life; and I'm thinkin' he'll have an idee, when he comes back to 'biz,' that it is quite a lively burg."

"His father is camped on the Medina, and will be worried about him. I suspect that those bushwhackers have pointed that way; although it is a mystery how they could have ascertained that Major Moreland was encamped there. It is pretty certain they have more spies and assassins in their pay, than those we have wiped out."

"I suppose all of you understand, that Antonio and Pedro were shot to prevent their revealing the names of their employers."

"In another moment, I should have had all the testimony that I needed; but this much can assure you. The men who sought this boy's life, and that of his father, and the bushwhackers, are one and the same party; and I'll ball all that, and bring them to a 'choke off,' of my name is not Dandy Dave."

"I've started this racket to beat the 'lay out,' and I'll keep the ball rolling, or roll of this ball of dirt myself."

"Come on, boys, for the Plaza House!"

A wild cheer for Dandy Dave rung through the bottom-timber, and, in a scattered manner, all conversing and arguing on the situation of affairs—which they agreed in thinking, were considerably "mixed"—the Texans proceeded on the return; Dave in the lead, and carrying Munroe in his arms.

But a short time elapsed, when the lad was placed upon a comfortable bed, and medical attendance at once procured.

The doctor administered an opiate, and promised the young scout that he would watch over his patient for the remainder of the night, admitting that there was danger of brain fever.

The wounded scalp was stitched up, and dressed, and when the boy had fallen into deathlike slumber, Dave left him.

In fifteen minutes more, the young scout was galloping, at terrific speed, over the mesquite-bordered road, toward the Pleasanton Ford, the Medina river; after thanking those who volunteered to accompany him, for he preferred to make the trip alone.

As may be supposed, Dandy Dave had ample food for thought; but his eagle eyes, for that, swept the road in his front, and darted glances continually into the mesquites, holding his rifle at half-cock in the hollow of his left arm, for he knew that his life was in peril every bound. He reasoned that the Greaser who had escaped from the Bull's Head, would not, after the shooting and hanging of the comrades, dare to remain in the Alamo City another minute.

They would, doubtless, strike toward the I Grande, by the same road that he was traveling; but, to make sure of their safety, they would keep in the mesquites, on a course parallel with the road.

Hence, he might, at any time, be discovered, recognized, and fired upon.

Not only this, but the bushwhackers might be in hiding, on the roadside, to waylay a man who might be on their way to the camp of Major Moreland, with the news of the startling tragic occurrences of the night.

That the two men, who had fired from the mesquites, were well informed of every movement of the major, Dave was confident; and that they were expert shots, and men who would do all in their power to carry out, to letter, their villainous and criminal plans the destruction of the Moreland family.

And thus, on galloped, at headlong speed, Dandy Dave; presenting a picture of perfect manhood, horsemanship, daring bravery, Indianlike watchfulness. On he dashed, toward the Rio Medina, and his fate—a fate, however, of which perhaps the reader may not correctly conjecture the character.

Every mile that he galloped, the words of the two conspirators, which he had—as a dream—overheard at the hotel in Port Lavaca were recalled with more distinctness.

They were now realized more easily, from consideration of the recent tragic events which he had figured so prominently.

CHAPTER XIV.

ON THE MEDINA.

It was an earthly paradise that had been selected by "Blacksnake Bill" for the night's camp of the wagon-train of Major Moreland.

He knew every crook and turn of the streams within five miles of every ford in west Texas. But never before had Bill been honored by holding the position of wagon-master and adviser to his employer; for the major knew little of the country, and consequently sought the advice of his teamster quite often.

This state of affairs gratified Bill very much; but he did not take any advantage, and make himself too familiar, as many others might have done.

In this way, however, the time passed more pleasantly than it otherwise would. All went smoothly, and Blacksnake Bill would have brooded death, in any form, to defend any one of the Moreland family. All the while, his tongue kept running like a Yankee shuttle.

From having sole charge of the train, and personally conducting or driving the huge Chihuahua wagon, Bill felt the pride of a prince, and was as happy as the day was long. When at leisure, he was studying the country ahead in his mind, to select the most beautiful and desirable camping-places.

The cove chosen for the camp on the Medina, was of nearly horse-shoe form, being, except at the open heel, bordered by towering moss-draped trees; the branches also being entwined thickly with many varieties of creeping vines.

It contained about two acres of grass, and as the moon rose high in the heavens, it revealed plainly the encampment in every detail.

The wagons had been left in two lines, the poles toward the swell of the cove—three in each line—and the vehicles ten paces apart. To one side blazed a huge camp-fire, where supper was being now prepared by the negroes.

Blacksnake Bill was getting ready his own evening meal, by a cheery blaze between the lines of wagons; for he declared that he "c'dn't never relish no grub without he cooked hit hisself."

Three negroes guarded the mules and saddle-horses, which were staked beyond the entrance to the cove, between the timber and the mesquites.

There was no danger apprehended from any foes, red or yellow, at this point, much less from whites. Everything spoke of peace.

Although the day had been exceedingly hot, the air, near the river, in the bottom-land, three hours after sunset, was damp; and a heavy dew caused it to be pleasanter near a fire. And it is thus that we call the attention of the reader to Major Moreland and his lovely daughter; the latter having changed her riding-habit for a short gray woolen dress, with tight basque, which was not only more comfortable, in permitting an easy movement, but was suitable for the night.

Major Moreland was a powerfully built man, with broad shoulders, and some six feet in height. His hair was worn long, and was sprinkled with gray. He was a typical Southern gentleman, of the old school; who was at home, so to speak, anywhere that he happened to be. Kind and courteous was he, and respected and beloved by all who knew him.

Serviceable and appropriate to the road was his costume, which consisted of woolen breeches, thrust into the tops of boots, blue woolen shirt, with flowing collar; the last being worn over a black silk kerchief, loosely knotted.

The usual revolvers and bowie, carried by all borderers, were belted about his waist.

Blacksnake Bill was attired in much the same way, except that his breeches were of buckskin, fringed down the outer seams; while his shirt, hat, and boots, were of coarser make and material. They were, besides, much stained and soiled; and his belt, and arms, showed the marks of much service.

Bill was thin in flesh, and spare of face; but his eyes were keen and piercing, and his expression thoroughly honest.

His hair was long, hanging in a mass over his shoulders; burned by the sun, and bleached in appearance, presenting the indication that such a thing as a comb was in the vocative.

Thus was made up the camp of the major. As to the negroes, no description is necessary. They were of different ages. Five males, the teamsters, two females, the cook, and Mamie's special attendant—the latter, known as Nanny, and the cook, as 'Lizbuth.

At the time they are introduced to us, full three hours had passed since the wagons entered the cove; but it had taken some time to arrange matters. All was now straight, however.

The major and Bill, with their rifles over their shoulders, had taken a turn down the river, on the border of the timber. The sun had set.

Mamie had bagged two cotton-tailed rabbits for her supper, her father a jack-rabbit, and the more fortunate Bill, a fat turkey.

One of the negroes had caught a number of firm-fleshed cat-fish, none of them weighing less than a pound; and all were in high spirits at their success in securing a good supper by their own hands, and that at a point so near the Alamo City.

Mamie admired greatly the vine and moss draped trees, the grand arches, within the timber, amid which fluttered countless birds, seeking their resting-places for the night; but shamed by the fresh clear notes of the mocking-bird, which would cheer the dark and somber woods, until Old Sol again shot upward from the Orient.

"You do not mean that the Frio and Leona surpass the Medina in loveliness, Bill, I am sure? It seems impossible."

This was said by the young girl, as the wagon-master had made some depreciating remark, on hearing her enthusiastic praises of the beauties of the moonlit cove.

"But I does mean it, Miss Mamie—every word! Hit's free open perrarer, beyont ther timmer, on ther Frio and Leona; an' thar's deer, anterlope, an' turkey, till yer can't rest."

"Mebbe so yer doesn't think ther cat-fish an' sof-shell turkles 'll squirm an' crawl up ter yer camp-fire, an' flop tharselves plum inter ther fry-in-pan, winkin' at yer ter sot her onter ther coals? I kin tell yer, if yer don't—"

The young girl burst into a peal of laughter. Major Moreland merely cast a glance around, and then resumed his meditation.

"Now, Bill," said Mamie, "I do wish you would confine yourself to the truth. You are forever darting off into the most extravagant assertions, that would put Munchausen to shame."

"Doesn't know him. What train does he drive in? War he ever on ther Leona, er ther Frio?"

"Oh, no! He was the prince of prevaricators in his time, and that was hundreds of years ago."

"Beg pardon, Miss Mamie; but what mought a pervaricator be? They hain't got nothin' ter do with mule-drivin' er I'd 'a' heerd o' them."

"To speak plainly, Bill, the said Munchausen was the most gifted liar that ever lived."

"Thought they usen't ter lie in old times?"

"Well, Bill, I believe it has always been a fashionable accomplishment, as far back in the dim dark ages as we have any record of. If Texas had been settled in the old time, by the same kind of people who now form the population of the Lone Star State—especially the mule-driving portion—the Coliseum at Rome would not contain the volumes necessary to record their prevarications, even if printed in diamond type."

"Now, Miss Mamie, yer hes me clean off ther trail. I hain't no idee what ye're drivin' at."

"I was only talking nonsense, as usual, Bill. But, I say, I do wish Munroe had not returned to San Antonio, for he would have enjoyed a ramble with me down the river by moonlight."

"Do you think that he will have any difficulty in finding his way here?"

"Not if he recomembers what I told him. Ther boyee war flustered, an' mought forgit."

"I told him ter glide down the drink, 'bout two mile from ther ford. I reckon he'll turn up 'bout midnight, straight up an' piert."

"Bill, that cat-fish is burning. Turn it over."

Now the teamster prided himself on his culinary skill, and was hurt at Mamie's having discovered his negligence. The fish was really burning, but Bill was equal to the emergency. Giving the fryingpan a dextrous, but slight jerk, which caused the fish to flop over on its opposite side, he returned:

"Thet fish air fer my pertic'lar mastercation, an' I likes 'em brown, an' sorter crisp-like. I doesn't like cat rare done."

For some time, Mamie and Bill conversed in this way; then all partook of their late supper, and Bill proceeded to superintend the driving up of the mules, and re-staking of the horses within the cove.

The major resumed his old position after supper, standing with his back to the camp-fire, and gazing at the timber in the foreground. He seemed to be strangely depressed.

Did the dangers and horrors, that were to come, cast their shadows before?

Was the old planter's mind filled with presentiments of dread events, which were to happen?

Was his mind, by some mysterious and inexplicable influence, depressed, from the fact that his only son, at that very moment, lay in a deathlike slumber, in the Plaza House, after having narrowly escaped being assassinated?

Or, was it influenced by the approach of one, who would gladly plunge a knife in his heart; one, who sought his death; the death of his loved boy, and the worse than death of his angelic daughter?

Who shall say which of these causes were at work, or if any; or explain his unusual gloom and forebodings, mirrored in his face, felt by him, and forced upon his mind, in spite of every attempt to throw off the unaccountable and indescribable feelings?

Thus he stood, as Mamie and Bill came up, after attending to the animals; both, for the first time, realizing that there was something strange about the attitude, and the prolonged silence of the major.

As they watched him, Mamie being about to speak, the old planter bent forward, threw his sombrero to the earth, and stretched out his hands, as if warding off some dread shape. His

gaze was straight before him, his eyes being fixed in a stony stare.

Thus stood Major Moreland; not a word from his lips, and his breath coming and going, in short and labored gasps!

His daughter instantly gazed, guided by his position, and her face turned pallid. She staggered, and clutched the arm of Bill, while a piercing shriek escaped her. Then, in a gasping voice, she uttered the words:

"Uncle Lancel!"

Bill stood speechless, and his eyes fastened, with a horrified look, in front of him.

What did they see?

Framed in the green verdure, midway between the earth and the tree-tops, was a human face—ghastly and cadaverous—the silvery moon revealing every line and lineament to the startled observers.

It was the face of Lancelot Lanewood, the miscreant; and murder lurked in his vengeful eyes!

CHAPTER XV.

A DEED OF DARKNESS.

"PAPA! Oh, papa!"

Strange and unnatural was the voice of Mamie Moreland, as, clutching the arm of Blacksnake Bill, her eyes fixed upon the face amid the foliage, she called wildly upon her father.

Bill was not one to be frightened at anything tangible, at anything that the could hope to overcome; but he now believed that he was looking upon something supernatural, something that came as a warning of death to all who gazed upon it. The wagon-master's fears were strengthened by the strongly-evinced fright that was manifested by those, who were his superiors in intelligence.

And, to increase these emotions in all, loud shrieks came from the naturally superstitious negroes.

At this moment, the cadaverous face disappeared; but instantly, in its place, appeared another, which was the very opposite in appearance. Large, red, and bloated, with flashing eyes, that shot glances down upon the terrified girl—glances which caused her to shudder, although the change of faces had banished from her mind, and that of Bill, all suspicions of the vision being supernatural in its origin.

In fact, it was but the strangeness, the mystery of the unaccountable face amid the leaves, and the conviction it brought that foes were near, which so startled Mamie at the first. As for the major, his mind was also free from any superstition in regard to it. He, at first, believed it to be an optical delusion; born of the fact, that the face was that of the man of whom he had just been thinking.

As has been stated, the old planter had been abstracted and depressed. His principal object in removing from his plantation was that he might place his children out of the reach of that very man whom he had always believed to be his brother.

That brother had sworn a fearful oath of vengeance when banished from Moreland Plantation for having attempted an outrageous crime while the major's guest; and he was not one who would forget that oath, as Maurice Moreland well knew. Therefore it was that he wished to be where he could be free from all apprehensions; and he had taken every precaution to that end. What he feared was for his children—that Mamie might be abducted, or Munroe crippled by a coward shot.

The name of his reputed brother was peculiar, yet never since he had ordered him from his house had Major Moreland heard of any one of the name of Lancelot Moreland, although he had frequently used means to discover the whereabouts of the man he so dreaded.

Nothing had he known of the dastard for two years, and he was now taking steps to prevent him from ever knowing where he was, and fulfilling his oath of vengeance. And now when his mind was burdened with apprehensive thoughts, fears that his unnatural brother might discover him in his new home, then—to crush his hopes and render his abandonment of home of no benefit—the face of Lancelot Moreland, in all its corpse-like repulsiveness, the eyes flashing with vengeful exultation, taunting and hatred, appeared before him amid the foliage of the trees!

No wonder was it that the major gasped for breath, and that his terror was tinged with despair.

Strong, self-reliant, and brave man though he was, it was not strange that Major Moreland, under these circumstances, was thus affected.

But no sooner did he behold the red and bloated face take the place of that of his detested brother than the old planter straightened himself erect, and sprang for his rifle.

Just then, however, a sharp, whip-like report echoed and re-echoed among the arches of the Medina timber, and Maurice Moreland fell upon the sward, as if a bullet had torn through his brain!

With a wild cry of anguish and horror Mamie staggered toward her father and fell upon his seemingly lifeless form, apparently as devoid of life as he appeared to be.

But Blacksnake Bill was not one to either faint or falter. His superstitious fears had vanished upon the changing of the faces in the foliage, and the instant that Mamie released her grasp upon his arm, he jerked his revolver, and although no human face was now visible, quickly and in rapid succession fired four shots, aiming at the point where they had appeared.

A howl of agony, fierce curses, and a crashing through the branches were heard. Then came a heavy sound of a fall upon the ground; and Bill ran to the side of Mamie and her father and hastily examined, to ascertain if there was any pulsation in the old planter's wrist.

Well he knew that he was thus exposing himself to the fire of the assassins, one of whom at least was uninjured; but Blacksnake Bill was devoid of fear, and although eager to pursue and slay the miscreants, he could not leave those who had won his regard until he became satisfied whether his employer was dead or alive.

So excited was he, however, that for his life he could not tell whether there was any pulsation or not.

Then, with a grunt of self-contempt, he quickly searched for the bullet-wound, knowing, from the position in which the major had stood, and the instantaneous effect of the shot, that his head had been struck. This was evident, too, on examination.

The welling blood among the gray hair guided the finger of Bill, and an outcry of mingled joy and relief burst from his lips.

The next moment the wagon-master was bounding forward toward the dark shades, and crashing through the undergrowth, revolver in hand; his eyes flashing fury, and his face stamped with an insane longing for revenge.

Blacksnake Bill was on the war-path, and if he shot, he would shoot to kill.

The two negro women rushed to the wagons and, crawling in, hid themselves at the first shot.

The men ran to the entrance of the cove, to prevent the animals from stampeding into the mesquites; the wagons hiding their prostrate master and mistress from their view.

Hardly had Bill disappeared into the undergrowth when out from the same, at a point nearer the river, sprung no other than Bob Barnes, his repulsive face redder from excitement and from a knowledge that his life was now in great danger.

A ghastly visage peered through the undergrowth at the same point from whence Bob had dashed, and from its thin lips bitted the words:

"Knife the old cuss, if he ain't dead; and then bring the girl, or I'll put a ball through you!"

"Who in Satan fired those shots? I'll kill him if I have to seek him for years! He has bored me through the arm, curse him! I'm faint; I'll crawl for the horses."

With these words Lance Lanewood sunk to the ground, and then crept through the undergrowth cautiously and with apparent weakness.

Bob Barnes paid no attention to the orders of his companion in crime, as they were but a repetition of previous words of the same character; but he made fast time for the spot where the old planter and his daughter were lying.

One glance convinced Bob that the old planter was dead, and he knew that he himself must hasten from the vicinity. Catching up the unconscious maiden in his arms, and puffing like a porpoise, he darted into the dark shades at the nearest point, which was some distance from where he had left Lance Lanewood.

Bob knew, however, that Lance would, if he had the strength, make his way to the horses; but if he did not arrive by the time he had bound and gagged his captive, he must seek him and assist him to mount. They would then gallop to the ford, cross the Medina, and strike out for dear life toward the Rio Prio.

Death, an ignominious death, threatened them if they lingered. Lance had made a fool of himself by gratifying his desire to frighten the major.

The teamster had seen their faces, and fired upon them.

It had been a narrow escape from death.

Bob congratulated himself at having thus far escaped, and having captured the young girl.

Lance had become perfectly fiendish since he had caught a sight of those whom he had sworn to kill, and he was worse now that he had been wounded.

Bob Barnes had become really afraid of his pard.

Both were now outlaws, however, and they must keep together for their mutual safety.

This was the substance of the unharmed miscreant's self-communings, as he bound and gagged poor Mamie Moreland. Then, as he was about to go in search of his comrade, Lanewood, with grating teeth and deep but low curses, crawled into view. As he caught sight of the senseless maiden a fiendishly-triumphant expression came upon his cadaverous face, and he said, as he struggled to his feet, assisted by his confederate in crime:

"Good boy, Bob Barnes! You made the raffle. You're a brick—a pressed brick! Did you knife my respected brother?"

"There was no need. Your bullet had settled him. But crawl to your horse, man! Our lives ain't worth a picayune here. That teamster who shot you is hunting us. We must glide easy, or he'll hear the nags. Come; I'll help you up!"

"Curse him! I shall bleed to death. Twist a handkerchief round my arm, Bob. There is only the boy left to kill; but we are not safe, and the property is not mine, until we kill that teamster and every blasted nigger!"

"We can't do it now," returned Bob, impatiently; "and besides, the teamster doesn't know us, and the niggers thought we were spooks. Brace up—we're safe! Scoot along, Lance! Here we go! It's a deep game, but slow and sly are the words!"

Away, through the dense shades of the Rio Medina toward the ford, went the assassins, at a slow pace until they were beyond hearing from the camp. Then they galloped rapidly along the border of the timber.

Lance Lanewood was in great pain from his wound.

Surely it did not seem that he could lose a great quantity of blood without becoming weak and faint; and so it proved, or the sequel might have been somewhat different.

A spell soon was cast upon the miscreant's senses, as will be shown in another chapter.

CHAPTER XVI.

MEETING IN THE MOONLIGHT.

BLACKSNAKE BILL knew the exact point where the man had fallen from the tree. He also felt assured that, if one had escaped unharmed, he could not have reached the ground for some time after his wounded comrade had struck the earth; but Bill, in his excitement, knew not the length of time he had passed at the side of his wounded employer and his daughter.

Bill was experienced, as we know, in border warfare, and was not foolish enough to reveal himself beneath the tree from which the assassins had peered out into the camp, until he had inspected the neighborhood. Bars and arrows of moonlight made their way down between the foliage, at this point, so near the border of the timber; and the wagon-master at once saw that the birds had flown.

He also understood the secret of their having been enabled to depart quickly. A huge grapevine, which extended afar up to the tree-top, was still swaying; and this proved that the unharmed man had slid down, and borne away his wounded pard.

Blacksnake Bill was satisfied there had been but two men in the tree; and he had their faces indelibly photographed upon his mind.

Stealing forward, he saw that blood had flowed freely from the assassin he had shot; and, encouraged by this fact, and reasoning that the wounded man would be carried by his comrade to the river, and the wound bathed, the teamster proceeded, cautiously toward the stream, using his knowledge of bushwhacking to prevent himself from making more noise than he could possibly help.

Thus it was, that Bill's very reasonable inferences enabled the two miscreants, not only to escape, but to carry Mamie Moreland with them.

It was some time before Bill gave up all hope of discovering the cowardly assassins, and turned toward the camp, uttering threats of vengeance.

Not for an instant did it occur to him that the night-prowlers would commit any further crime, or venture to ascertain if the bullet had done its work thoroughly. Had the suspicion occurred to him, Bill would have immediately banished the thought, as absurd in the extreme; for there was, as he had decided, but one man who was able to walk, and he had his hands full in carrying away his wounded companion, and escaping from the vicinity.

Besides, Bill reasoned that, however desperate and daring the unhurt villain might be, or however important the object of their most cowardly attempts at assassinating his employer, he would expect to be riddled with bullets by the negroes, if he ventured into the camp.

What could be the motive of the villains, was a perplexing mystery to Bill; as he could not believe such a noble-hearted man as Major Moreland could have an enemy on earth. And especially strange was it, that the enemy should be a relative; for so the ejaculation of Mamie Moreland seemed to intimate.

The object of the dastards was, however, soon to be made evident to the wagon-master, and plunge him into deep anguish; for, as he burst from the undergrowth into the camp, and the bright moonlight, near the major's still and silent form. Bill gave vent to a deep groan.

"Dang, an' double dang my ideotic cabase!" he cried out; "will somebuddy blow my brains out? Thet air, ef I has any. I'll commit susanside ter onc't! What, in thunderation an' dang-nation, hev become o' Miss Mamie! Hev she crawled inter the Chihuahua? Nary; fer that hain't like her."

"By ther bleed o' ther Alermo martyrs, I'll t'ar up ther hull univarse ter find her! She's ther purtiest, neatest, bestest leetle gal thet ever

trod Texas dirt, er any other on this hyer yearth!"

Bounding over the form of his employer, Bill rushed to the huge wagon, yelling:

"O—o—oh, yes! Miss Mamie, air yer inside?"

No answer came from the Chihuahua.

"Dang my heart! I know'd she warn't!"

A tear actually rolled down each rough sunburnt cheek of Blacksnake Bill; probably the first that had moistened them for many years, unless brought forth by fierce "northers," or the blinding smoke of a raging prairie fire.

Brushing the drops off on his soiled sleeve, he rushed like a madman toward the entrance of the cove, crying out, as he did so:

"You, Jim, Tom, an' ther hull dang black outfit! Whar in thunderation's yer young missus?"

"We-uns hain't done see'd her, Mars' Bill! Gola'mighty! What's done broke loose? Am de debil bissell, an' all de hell folkses, out a ram-pagin' on de Medinar?"

"Mars' Bill, dem nags'll stompede, dead sure, ef dar's any mo' rumpus!" shouted another.

"Dang an' double dang ther hosses, mules, an' all yer black hides! Ain't yer young missus more 'count than all ther four-leg critters on ther yearth? Ther hellyuns, what shot yer master, hev tuck her sure, an' thar's no gittin' over hit!"

"Am ole mars' gone dead, Mars' Bill?"

It was plain that the negroes were greatly terrified, and almost overcome with grief; for they huddled together, and were shuddering in their superstitious terror, their eyes rolling, as they cast sweeping glances in all directions, as if they expected some dread sight to present itself.

"Wa-al, I shell chaw my own head off, with pure mad an' aggervation! I doesn't know what ter do," cried out poor Blacksnake Bill.

"Ther devil air ter pay, an' no pitch hot! Say, boyees, look out ther critters doesn't stompede; an' yer needn't ter be skeered, fer ther condemned hellyuns hev sloped, skuted, levanted, slid out, absquatulated, an' tuck Miss Mamie with them, es sures ther Lord made mules with ther power o' kickin'!"

"But, dang an' double dang Blacksnake Bill, ef he doesn't jump a nag, an' resky Miss Mamie, er leave his bones on ther trail!"

"Come on, one o' yer, an' git my boss saddled fer biz, purty lively! An', a couple o' yer, 'tend ter yer marster, right away!"

"Wash off his head, an' fotch him back ter Texas; though he'll wish he'd staid like he air, when he wakes up, an' finds his leetle gal air gone!"

Bill rattled these words off, like a man who had just so much to say within a limited time; and three of the slaves instantly obeyed his orders; knowing by Bill's manner that he was not to be trifled with, and believing, that if they hesitated a moment, he would shoot them in their tracks.

The teamster then strode back to the huge wagon, clutched a firebrand, and springing up on the tongue, thrust the blazing torch inside.

"Liz'buth" and Nancy, with arms clasped about each other, were huddled under the piano; their eyes filled with horror, and superstitious terror.

"Whar's yer young missus?" demanded Bill, his voice unnaturally strange and husky.

"Fo' de Lor' we-uns doesn't know, Mars' Bill! Done thought she war wid you an' ole mars'."

"Yer mus'n't go ter say she's bin done tuck by de debils in de bottom!"

"I reckon ther hellyuns hev scooped her in, dead sure," answered the wagon-master, in a despairing tone and manner, while his eyes filled with a vengeful light.

"Run this hyer camp, boyees, until I turns up. I'm skutin' fer ther hellyuns, an' may neves see yer ag'in—leastways, ef I doesn't fotch Miss Mamie back."

"I'm off now, fer I wouldn't be hyer when ther major comes back ter biz, an' finds no leetle gal, not fer ther hull o' Texas, an' New Mex' throw'd in. Hyer I go, whoopin' fer ther hellyuns!"

"Take keer o' ther mules, and ther Chihuahua!"

Bill sprung into his saddle, for his horse was, at that moment, led up by the negro; the other two being engaged in bathing the head of their master.

The old planter uttered a heavy groan.

Bill heard the sound, and with the words:

"Dang an' double dang my soft heart! Ef this hyer ain't too billious fer Blacksnake Bill!" he drove spurs, and his horse bounded, with a snort, along the border of the trees, to the entrance of the timber-cove. He passed the negro guard, with a warning sweep of his hand in the direction of the mules; and then, up the stream, between the mesquites and the towering trees, and keeping in the shade of the latter.

Had not the animals in the cove been fagged from the day's travel, they would, without doubt, have stampeded, at the shrieks and shots, in spite of every effort of the negroes to prevent it.

Blacksnake Bill had not gone more than fifty yards, when, coming toward him, at terrific speed, along the narrow natural lane between timber and mesquites, from up the river, dashed a horseman, whose character and color he was unable to determine.

Bill jerked his revolver, and brought his horse to a halt, perfectly satisfied that the programme for the night was both varied and startling, not to say tragic.

The desperate daring, shown by the miscreant assassins in entering the camp, and abducting Mamie Moreland, had astonished Bill; and he now believed that the same dastard had concealed the maiden, and was returning to avenge the shooting of his villainous confederate.

Good reason had he, under the circumstances, to think this; and so the reader will agree in saying.

This just suited Bill.

He resolved to wound the dastard, capture him, and torture him until he made known the place where he had secreted his fair captive.

"Dang an' double dang your black heart! Here I bees!" yelled Blacksnake Bill.

"Halt! Hold up yer paws, er I'll bore yer bestest bleed mersheen!"

"Whar's ther leetle gal what yer tuck? Spit out ther infermashe, er down goes yer sugar-house!"

But few of these words were understood by the rider, who came rapidly dashing on.

He had his revolver in his hand, and seemed ready for business, as well as Bill.

However, the words betrayed the fact, that the man who barred the way was a Texan; and the stranger cried out, as he rode up:

"Put up your shooter, my man! I am a friend to all who are square and white. Where is Major Moreland encamped?"

As the last words left the stranger's lips, his horse bounded to the side of Bill's animal, and the wagon-master at once knew that the stranger must be all right.

It was none other than Dandy Dave.

"Whar yer from, an' who air yer?" asked Bill.

"I'm Dandy Dave, from San Antonio, and I'm in chase of two devils, in the shape of men, who mean to kill the major, if they can."

"They hired assassins to shoot young Moreland, and they also intend to steal his sister."

"Lead on to the camp, quick, if you know where it is!"

"Dandy Dave, I knows yer, and I thanks ther good Lord yer hes 'roved!"

"Ther hellyuns war hyer afore yer, though; an' they tried ter shoot ther major. They laid him out, but he'll git 'roun' all O. K."

"Es ter ther leetle gal, though, Dandy Dave, she air tuck! Ther devils hes levanted with her, but I'll git her from them, er die a-tryin'." I wounded one, 'fore they gut off."

"Merciful Heaven!" groaned Dandy Dave; "too late! Too late!"

CHAPTER XVII.

TORTURING SUSPENSE.

FOR an instant the young scout pressed his hand hard upon his brow. He then clutched the reins, and cried out, in a more hopeful voice:

"Blacksnake Bill! I recognize you now. I heard the clatter of hoofs, but a short distance to the west. It must have been the assassins."

"They are galloping to the ford, to escape with their captive. Stay by the camp, Bill! I'll rescue Mamie Moreland, or lose my life in the attempt."

As Dandy Dave yelled the last words, he whirled his horse, drove spurs, and darted on the back trail.

Blacksnake Bill was astonished. He well knew that Dave was a most skillful scout, and a daring and reckless fighter; but he could not imagine how he had learned the names of the major and his family. This was strange; and stranger still, the young Texan had known they were encamped on the Rio Medina.

Dave had not seen the major in San Antonio. This, Bill knew; for he had remained with the train, all the time during the halt.

Suddenly, however, the perplexity of the wagon-master vanished. He recalled the words of Dandy Dave, in regard to the miscreants having hired assassins, and the attack on Munroe.

This explained all.

Munroe had been saved by Dave, and the latter had, in some manner, gained a knowledge of the instigators of the crime, and their intentions to shoot the major, and abduct Mamie.

It was a mystery to Bill, for he could not understand how any one could bear enmity to his employer, to that extent.

Whoever was at the head of these outrages, must be a practical plotter, and have spies in his pay.

It was a deplorable state of things, to say the least, and the end was not yet.

Where was Munroe?

If wounded, as it seemed reasonable to suppose, from Dave's words, and the absence of the youth, was he in danger of death?

What was to be done, under these perplexing and harrowing circumstances?

As Blacksnake Bill meditated in this way, he became bewildered, and muttered in soliloquy:

"What 'll I do? Which way 'll I skute? I begin ter think thar's more cussedness comin'."

"Ef ther major hed stud still, jist a leetle bit

longer, his brain-box would ha' gut bored, dead sure and sart'in. Ther or'nary critter, what shot him, war no slouch with a rifle."

"Wa-al, I c'u'dn't keep within a mile o' Dandy Dave on this hyer critter. He'll overhaul 'em an' bore 'em, I'm bettin' high; though thar ain't nobuddy ter kiver my pesos, nor hold ther stakes."

After a moment's reflection, Bill continued:

"Come ter think, thar mought be a hull batch o' ther hellyuns, an' they're pickin' off one et a time, ter git persesh' o' ther train! Thet's ther only way ter 'splain things, and I'm dog'd ef I doesn't tend ter biz! I'm 'sponserble fer ther hull outfit."

"Ther niggers 'u'd skute, fu'st shot, ef any crooked cusses run in on 'em; an' then everythin' 'u'd go ter smash. I hes a heap o' confederence in Dandy Dave, so I'll skute back an' look arter ther train."

"I'd never git a show ter be wagon-master ag'in, ef this hyer outfit gits bu'sted up."

Whirling his horse half about, Blacksnake Bill spurred at speed toward the camp.

Munroe Moreland had soon sunk to slumber, and the doctor, feeling confident that the youth would sleep until morning, and awaken well and refreshed, returned home, as he himself was in need of sleep.

Full an hour lay Munroe thus. But it was no sound sleep. In his dreams he saw some horrible vision, or he was himself in deadly peril from a dread source. It was evident that the occurrences of the evening were being reproduced in the boy's mind.

At length his eyes suddenly opened, and a half-stifled shriek burst from his lips. This broke the awful dream-spell that had bound him, and his breath came and went in gasps.

Munroe's eyes were wild and filled with horror, and he looked the picture of utter bewilderment. He tried to recall the near past, but the effects of the opiate that had been given him, kept his brain in a whirl; and, once more, his heavy lids drooped, and closed over his eyes.

He retained sufficient reasoning power, however, to realize that not only was he relapsing into deep slumber, but that this should not be—that his presence was needed elsewhere. By a superhuman effort the youth arose to a sitting posture, and perceiving a glass upon a stand near his bed, which contained a red liquid, he caught it up and endeavored to ascertain by the smell what it was.

Munroe knew that the liquor was brandy, and quickly drank several swallows.

Soon the effects of the brandy became manifest and the boy's ears became more natural in appearance, his cheek flushed; but his gaze was fixed, as in deep thought.

Munroe Moreland was striving to unravel the near past; and but a short time elapsed before his manner and expression proved that much had been made clear to him. He remembered that he had seen his villainous uncle in the mesquites; and that that uncle and a confederate had fired into the lynch-ers who were hanging the miscreant Mexicans.

He knew that he must have fainted from weakness and apprehension; and he feared that Dandy Dave had fallen a victim to his dastard uncle.

Dave was the recognized leader of the lynch-ers, and would naturally be selected as a target; and now it was, that the thought came into the youth's mind, that this very uncle might be the one who had bribed the Mexicans to kill him. It must be so!

Dandy Dave had asserted that Antonio Corrillo had been paid to murder him, and this could be the only explanation of the attempted assassination. Previously it had been a mystery why any one should seek his life, especially in a town where he was a stranger; but he now believed that he had solved it.

Munroe recalled the fact that his uncle had sworn a fearful oath of vengeance, when, for an outrageous insult to a lady guest at their home, he had been banished from Moreland Plantation.

Now, it seemed plain that Lancelot Moreland had not forgotten his oath; that, through spies, he had learned of the proposed removal from the Rio Brazos, and the time of their reaching San Antonio.

The boy also recalled a vow he had himself taken, to avenge the blows given him by the same cowardly villain; but of which, through shame, he had never spoken to any one.

As Dandy Dave had balked the assassin, it was plain that the rifles had been aimed at Dave from the mesquites. The brave and handsome scout, who had saved his life, had, he feared, been shot for doing the noble deed.

Then, as in a dream, Munroe remembered having been borne from the river by Dandy Dave.

The young scout, then, had not been killed, nor even seriously wounded, by the night-riders.

This relieved the youth's mind, but then came the recollection that Dave had declared his father and sister to be in danger.

Who other than this dastard uncle would have the slightest desire to harm them or himself?

Terribly excited became Munroe Moreland.

Dandy Dave had brought him here, it was evident, engaged a medical man, and then started for the Rio Medina, to warn his father.

Would Dave arrive in time?

The assassins had headed in that direction.

Might they not have gone to the camp, shot his father, and abducted Mamie?

Dandy Dave had lost time, by bringing him to San Antonio, and having him cared for.

His father might have been slain, while he lay here, sleeping!

Were his terrible dreams but the reproductions of what had occurred on the Rio Medina?

As Munroe's thoughts, flashing electric-like, reached this point, a clock in the next room struck the hour of midnight.

Every stroke pierced the brain of the boy, who lay thus mentally tortured, like a shaft of red-hot steel; for it was the hour at which he had promised to be in camp, with his father and sister.

Bounding from the couch, Munroe Moreland gulped down the remainder of the brandy, dressed himself in haste, buckled his belt of arms—which he found hanging upon the bed-post—around him; and then, with his boots in his hand, stole from the room, and down the stairway.

The night clerk was asleep in his chair.

Munroe had made his way quite easily, as a light burned in the hall.

Quickly passing from the outer door, he at once recognized his surroundings.

The Main Plaza, with the ancient church, of such peculiar architecture, on the west side, was before him, illumined by the bright and silvery moon.

Pulling on his boots, the youth ran around the corner, to Sappington's stables, demanded his horse from the sleepy attendant, paid his bill, and then sprung into his saddle.

The next moment, he was galloping, at break-neck speed, from the town; by the road that had been taken by the wagon-train, and by Dandy Dave.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A CLOSE SHAVE.

MAMIE MORELAND was not one who was likely to lose her presence of mind, in the hour of danger. In this respect, she was, in fact, one in a hundred.

She had seen that ghastly face, framed in by the foliage; and though, at the first, fearfully startled, she soon recognized it.

It was that of her uncle, who had been a terror to her in years gone by—who had been the one cloud, to darken their happy home. And he had been banished from that home, by her father, as she remembered.

But why had he thus appeared to them?

How knew he that they were there, that they were seeking a new home—and what could be his object?

It was strange, mysterious, unaccountable.

It was more than this—it was terrible!

There was no sound—nothing but that still, white face, ghastly in the silvery moonlight; with its framework of enameled green leaves, and the darkness as a background.

The maiden actually gasped for breath, and tightly clutched the arm of Blacksnake Bill for support; more affected, from the fact that Bill and her father were speechless.

Not, after the first moment's steady gaze, did Mamie Moreland harbor a thought of the face being other than what it was. And when she became convinced that it was really that of her feared and detested uncle, then it was that she recalled the terrible vow of vengeance that he had taken.

Yet although Mamie recovered in a moment the use of her tongue, she could not move a muscle. She was paralyzed with a nameless dread, and when the faces changed, the alarm of the poor girl was doubled. Had she known under what circumstances she would next gaze upon that bloated and repulsive face, she would have lost all sense at once.

Well is it that we cannot foresee coming events, or form the faintest idea of what the future has in store for us.

But, as the reader already knows, Mamie had little time to think, or be tortured with the dread anxiety that ruled her; for but a moment or two elapsed after the disappearance of that ghastly face and the substitution of the bloated one, when a spurt of flame shot out from the screen of leaves just as her father sprung to his rifle.

This was followed by a sharp report, and she saw her loved parent fall, apparently lifeless—evidently slain by his own brother!

With a cry of bitter agony Mamie Moreland sprang forward and fell senseless upon the prostrate form of her father.

But, as has been said, being naturally of strong nerves, she recovered at the very moment that Bob Barnes placed her across the shoulders of his horse, clambered into the saddle and took her in his arms.

The recent most tragic occurrences had been too deeply impressed upon the young girl's mind to be banished by a short term of unconsciousness.

Consequently Mamie at once realized that she was no longer in camp—no longer under the protecting care of her father and Blacksnake Bill, but in the power of merciless miscreants and vengeful assassins.

From the fact that she strove to cry out, and struggled to free herself when she found that she was bound and gagged, she was brought to a consciousness of her condition, and this caused the scene in the camp to come up before her at once.

Her father was dead—murdered! and she was a captive to his assassin, and being borne she knew not whither, and to a fate she dared not think of.

She was in the power of a worse than brute, but who bore the semblance of man.

Was it her villainous uncle, or his confederate?

Darkness ruled, and as the horse upon which she was went on through crashing undergrowth the maiden knew that she was in the bottom-timber of the Rio Medina, and but a short distance from camp and from the corpse of her murdered father.

This she felt assured of, as she had regained her senses the moment her captor mounted.

Occasionally a ray of moonlight shot down through the branches; and after they had gone a little distance, one of these played upon the head of the wretch who held her in his arms.

Then Mamie Moreland saw the red and bloated face, that had appeared among the leaves, when that of her uncle vanished. She shuddered with horror, and, turning her head around, was doubly horrified at seeing that ghastly visage again, and filled with fury.

For one moment, the bar of moonlight revealed this, and also the fact that a white kerchief was bound around her uncle's arm, near the shoulders; and that this, and his sleeve were partly saturated with blood.

Could it be possible that, while she had been unconscious, a fierce fight had occurred?

While she had been in possession of her senses but one shot had been fired, and that by her miscreant uncle; the bullet killing, as she believed, her father.

How could she have been taken captive, when Blacksnake Bill was near her when her father fell?

Surely Bill would have protected her with his life?

He must have made an effort to save her.

There had been a fight, for the wound in the arm of her murderous uncle proved this.

These thoughts and reasonings could terminate in but one decision—a decision that caused a heavier weight of anguish, if such were possible.

Bill had been slain—he must have been—in attempting to prevent her capture.

None except the slaves, remained in the camp; indeed these must have all fled in terror, and the animals have stampeded.

What would her brother not suffer, on returning to camp?

He would find but the wagons, and the dead bodies.

He would find that she was gone, and he would know that she must have been carried away by the murderers.

In her anguish, at the thought of what Munroe would suffer, the poor girl lost sight, for the moment, of her own dread and seemingly hopeless condition.

But, it was not for long. Suddenly her captor's horse broke from the undergrowth into the clear space between the timber and the mesquites, followed by her villainous uncle, cursing terribly.

"I'll have the heart's blood of that infernal cuss that shot me!"

These words, accompanied by fearful oaths, burst from Lanewood, in vengeful tones, and almost convinced the maiden that Blacksnake Bill was yet alive.

Again the villain spoke:

"Why didn't you knife the major, and make sure of him, Bob?"

"There wasn't no time, and I saw that there was no need, as I told you. That white teamster was hunting us in the bush, and liable to jump out at any time; besides the niggers were just beyond the wagons. I couldn't have made no fight, with the girl in my arms. I think I did mighty well, to get away with her, as I did."

"If you had climbed down the tree when I started, the bullets would have gone over your head, and you wouldn't have got winged. It's cussed unlucky, just at this time. I've got to play the game of 'get away,' by myself, it seems. How do you feel?"

These words convinced Mamie of the safety of Blacksnake Bill and the slaves.

This was some consolation.

It may be thought strange, that a maiden, who believed her father to have just been murdered, could entertain such a feeling; but it had all been so sudden and unexpected, that the poor girl, situated as she was, could not fully comprehend her great bereavement.

Her anxiety for Bill and the negroes, and her anguish on account of her brother, connected with her own probable fate—these, forming a whirlpool of agonizing thoughts, served to blunt her brain.

But for this, had there been but the one fearful subject for her to dwell on, she would not probably have heard the words that gave birth to hope; albeit they came from an unexpected source, and at any other time would not have been thought worthy of notice.

These words were spoken by Lance Lanewood, and were prefaced by a volley of terrible oaths.

"I say, Bob Barnes, I've a notion to turn back. You never was known to carry out one's directions to the letter, and make dead sure of things as you went along."

"What's struck you now, Lance? But, before you reply, I'll just say that I want you to understand, that I'm perfectly well aware that I have made an infernal fool of myself in going into this blasted biz with you in the first place."

"However, I've done my part, and I've done it well, which is more than you can say."

"You made an idiot of yourself, allowing your thirst for revenge to get the best of you, and thereby you showed your hand before it was time to throw a card. All this should have been done on the Frio, or the Leona; where we wouldn't have had to get up and dust for our lives."

"Now, spit out what's on your mind; but sling no acid gab at me, or I'll jump the track, and levant for a more congenial climate."

"What do you want to turn back for?"

"Why, to knife Major Moreland, of course!"

This was said in a less surly tone, and he continued:

"I tell you, Bob, I'm a good shot, but he jumped for his gun just a bit too soon for me. If he had stood an instant longer, like a graven image, I'd had him, dead sure!"

"But I'm as convinced, in my own mind, that the old cuss is alive, as if I saw him saddling his nag to chase us. I can't explain why I think so; but, mark my words, you'll find I'm right in this."

"He'll turn up, as full of fight as an Apache brave."

"Everything has gone wrong in the whole biz."

"Who would have thought that the boy, Munroe, would have escaped, when such a well-arranged plan to kill him had been carried out to the playing of the last card? Antonio had thirty or forty of his pards on hand, and had shot the first man who bucked against him. Just then, that infernal scout, Dandy Dave, must turn up."

"The boy got off with a scalp-wound, it seems; and the old man will skin through, I'll bet my life! Nearly a score of the Greasers have been killed, and we've got nothing but the girl to show for our winnings. Besides, I'm badly shot."

"I was too hasty, I'll admit, Bob; but I was mad—furious! I'll split the heart of that fellow who shot me, as Antonio put it at Lavaca!"

"I believe the major is dead, Lance: but, between you and me, I hope he ain't. If he is, we're dished, as sure as the devil's an Injun!"

"What do you mean?" demanded Lance furiously.

"If he's gone up, the train won't go any further. The wagons, freight and niggers are what we want. In fact, we must have them. We've got to use them to get into some outlaw gang, or we're gone up. Can't you see that much?"

"You're right, Bob! I let my mad get the best of me, this trip. I see that now well enough."

These words, passing between her captors, gave Mamie great hope. Who could have as much knowledge of the course of the bullet as the man who sighted the rifle? If her villainous uncle had doubts on this point, then surely there were grounds for hope.

By this conversation, too, Mamie learned much. First, that a plot had been formed against them. Secondly, that it had been started in San Antonio by an attempt to murder her brother, and that Munroe had been saved from death by one Dandy Dave. And thirdly, that many outlaw Mexicans were in the service of her uncle, a number of whom had been slain in the Alamo City.

Not only was the mind of the young girl relieved by this information, but she felt more hope, from the fact that the confederate of her treacherous relative, and who now held her in his arms, was dissatisfied and discouraged, and regretted having taken any part in the plot.

The conversation of the miscreants was, however, interrupted by some sound that seemed to awaken their suspicion and alarm.

Both halted suddenly, and listened intently.

The sound of hoofs was now plainly heard on the sward.

It was evident that the animal was going in a terrific gallop.

But a short distance from their position this horse passed the mesquites, screening the animal and its rider from view.

All perceived that it was controlled by a man, who urged his steed by kindly words as well as spurs.

The sounds became less audible.

"Git, Bob! Git like the devil! That was a close shave. It's Dandy Dave, and he'll be on our trail in a short time. Git, I say, or the game is up!"

"I'm ready and eager, but you'll bleed to death if you gallop too fast and keep your wound open."

"Better bleed to death than hang! Git, I say!"

And "git" they did, toward the ford.

Mamie Moreland could only pray in silence that the young scout might be guided fast on the trail.

CHAPTER XIX.

NEARER AND YET NEARER.

"CURSES on the luck!" cried out Lanewood, in fury, "whoever that rider is, he has heard the click of our horses' shoes on this stony ground."

"Luck's dead against us, Lance," returned Bob, urging his horse to greater speed. "It was foolish to trust to a Greaser. If we'd played the game through ourselves, we'd have won; that is, if you could only have kept your infernal temper in check."

"Antonio made a botch of the whole biz!"

"You're about right, Bob; but the gravy's spilled—most of it—and we can't spoon it up."

The noise made by the iron-shod steeds was detected, indeed, by the keen-eared young scout.

Although he was satisfied that two horsemen were galloping toward the ford, and had no doubts as to their identity, yet he kept on down the river, hoping they had not as yet been at the camp, and he would be in time to foil their plans.

Hence it was that Dandy Dave galloped eastward, soon breaking into the clear space between the mesquites and the bottom-timber, along which, but in the opposite direction, had sped but a few moments before Lance Lanewood and Bob Barnes, with their beautiful captive.

Dandy Dave soon met Blacksnake Bill, as has been mentioned, and then having learned the state of affairs at the camp, dashed headlong back toward the ford, determined to overtake the dastards and rescue the maiden at all hazards.

Dave had become deeply interested in the Moreland family, although he had met but one of them—the boy, Munroe.

The youth had very favorably impressed the young scout, and when the latter learned of the plot, his whole soul was in sympathy with the innocent and unfortunate trio, and he resolved that he would battle to the bitter end to defeat the villains and bring them to an ignominious death.

Being in possession of facts connected with the family history of the Morelands, of which the old major himself was ignorant, Dave felt a double interest in them, and an almost insane longing to frustrate the designs of their enemies. He had come into possession of the secret in so mysterious a manner that he began to believe he was fated to be the champion and avenger of the Morelands.

And later on, when in Antonio, he was at hand at the very opportune moment to defeat those whose secret had become his so strangely—and whom he had never expected to meet or to hear of—he became convinced that he had been providentially led to the spot, to save the Morelands from death and dishonor.

Thus the whole heart and soul of Dandy Dave was in the service of the threatened ones.

Feeling thus, a man of Dave's character was a most dangerous foe to Lance Lanewood and Bob Barnes; or, to any who might be connected with these miscreants, as he had already proved.

Could the dastard pair have seen the young scout, as he dashed on up the Medina in pursuit of them, they would have had good reasons for thinking that the cards were not running in their favor.

The thought of the position of the young girl, was torturing to Dandy Dave; and he spared not his spurs, as he dashed in pursuit, vowing that she should be rescued, if man could effect it.

But, to return to the abductors, and their captive.

"I'll bet my life, that horseman was Dandy Dave!"

"They say he is a scout, a trailer, and a very flend in a fight. Curse that fellow who wounded me! I'm helpless, at the very time I'm most needed."

Thus growled Lanewood, as he dashed along by the side of Bob Barnes. The latter returned:

"You may thank your stars that the bullet did not break the bone! If it had, you'd have been a gone coon, sure."

"But where, in the flend's name, shall we point for, after crossing the river? We shall lose time in the ford, and if that scout judges correctly as to our course, he may run in on us. I wish I was back in Orleans—hang me if I don't!"

"I'm beginning to fear that this is our last little game together, Lance."

"Never say die, Bob! If you were in my fix, you'd have cause to complain."

"If I can stop the flow of blood, and bandage my arm, then I sha'n't feel so weak; and I can plan further in this biz."

"We've got the girl, and that's three points in the game. Hang it, man, we'll win yet!"

"I don't see it in that light, Lance. She is a deuce of a burden, and will hinder our escape."

"Bah! You're losing your wits. If the major is not dead, he and the boy will follow, and we'll ambush them. Then our game is won!"

"Well, supposing that we did; there's this infernal scout, and that teamster. By Heavens, Lance, I believe it is *you* that are losing your wits!"

"They'll both be with the old man and the boy, and we can wipe them out easy. Then we're all O. K. No one else knows of our presence in West Texas."

"But, here we are at the ford. Once over, and I shall feel safer for the present."

The two miscreants thus conversed, as they rode side by side, taking no notice of the maiden.

The brave girl, instead of allowing herself to be plunged into hopeless despair, resolved to make an effort to loosen the cords that secured the gag in her mouth; in order that she might cry out, and warn those who might advance on the trail, and thus place themselves in danger of death from her abductors. The latter, evidently, intended to conceal themselves in the bushes, when they became aware that their pursuers were near at hand, and thus shoot them from their ambush.

But, as Lance spoke, Mamie became aware that she could not make such an attempt—that her opportunity to do so was gone—for, out from the dark shades they dashed, and into the moonlight, upon the wide, clear approach to the ford. The river, except where shaded by the high bank on the opposite side, being a shimmering ribbon of silver.

One glance only gave Mamie, and then closed her eyes before Bob Barnes had observed her.

"Not a word here," cautioned Lanewood, in a low, hoarse voice. "Some Mexicans live on the opposite bank. Keep in shade, when you get over, and walk your horse. If the cursed curs bark, drive spurs, and point down the road, toward the San Miguel. I'll follow you."

"All right," returned Bob, in a whisper.

The next moment the young girl heard the splashing of water, and knew that they were fording the stream. She prayed more earnestly than ever, that Dandy Dave might be speeded on the trail—prayed that the miscreants might receive their just deserts, and that she might be saved from the terrible fate which seemed to be her doom.

The poor maiden had begun to fear that, after crossing the river, her chances for being rescued would be greatly lessened.

It was only by the greatest effort of will that Mamie could now control herself.

She was filled with horror, loathing, and dread, and longed to writhe from the miscreant's arms.

It was a fearful strain to her nerves, to remain limp and still—a most terrible ordeal—and only the strongest faith in an overruling Providence, that these wretches would not be permitted to succeed in their villainous designs, and the almost certain conviction that her father had not been killed, kept her from falling into a state of hopeless despair.

Up the steep south bank of the river the horses climbed, with great difficulty, and gained the upper level, panting with exertion.

To the left of the exit from the ford, and quite near it, were several Mexican *jacals*; and, directly ahead, winding through the mesquites, stretched the wagon-road.

Curses came from the lips of the two worthies, as a half-dozen mongrel dogs sprung toward them, and began barking furiously. But, at the same time their blood chilled, for the iron-shod hoofs sounded from the gravelly approach to the ford; and, as they turned their heads, the sharp report of a rifle caused their flesh to creep, and, with a shriek that was almost human, the horse of Lance Lanewood sprang into the air, and then fell to the earth, blood spurting from its mouth and nostrils.

"Spur, Bob! Spur for your life, to the San Miguel! I'll take to the bush and join you. Guard the girl, mind you, with your life!"

Thus yelled Lanewood, as he rushed from his dying horse into the dense shades of the mesquites.

The red face of Bob Barnes became ghastly.

One glance revealed to him a horseman, a dashing young Texan, with rifle in hand, his horse bounding into the ford, on the opposite side of the Rio Medina, and spattering the waters high in air on every side of him.

Bob believed the pursuer to be Dandy Dave, and, agreeably to the orders of his confederate, he drove spurs home, and darted for the San Miguel.

At that very instant, Mamie Moreland raised her bound arm upward, clutched the cord that held the gag in her mouth, and wrenching it out, gave one piercing cry of despair and anguish.

Curses most terrible, came from the throat of

Bob Barnes; but he could not again gag his captive, for she had thrown the wad of buckskin to the earth. But curses were of no avail.

As an echo to the shriek of Mamie, there came a long and cheering yell from the ford.

Hope filled the heart of the captive maiden.

She felt convinced that a rescuer was at hand—one who was invincible, and would save her!

Who could it be, if not the young scout, who had prevented the assassination of her brother?

It was not her father, Munroe, or Blacksnake Bill. This she well knew.

It must, then, be the scout, Dandy Dave!

Her more than life depended upon him, and from her white lips came whispered prayers and pleadings, that Heaven would guide him to the rescue of a wronged and suffering girl.

Thus they rode; the desperado with his fair captive, and the gallant young Texan in close pursuit.

CHAPTER XX.

MEETING HIS FATE.

So insanely eager was Dandy Dave to reach the level above, and dash to the rescue of the maiden, that horse and man came very near falling back into the river; so frantic were the herculean efforts of the noble beast.

Bob Barnes was now a yard or so in the lead, and the face of Mamie, deathly pale, was revealed in the clear rays of the moon. Her long wavy hair hung over the arm of her captor.

The cadaverous face of Lanewood could also be seen in profile, gazing out in apprehension from the bush.

Such was the tableau presented to Dave's view.

On he came, upon his noble steed, fury in his eyes, and determined resolution upon his lips.

No wonder was it that the perfidious pair were, for the moment, appalled, and unable to move.

The brave scout would not kill the miscreant, with the corpse-like face. Such a wretch must die an ignominious death—by the rope!

His very breath contaminated the earth, but his time had not yet come. He must be made to suffer something of the torture, that he had so mercilessly inflicted upon others.

Well knew Dave, that the villain, who held the maiden captive, could take to the mesquites, and baffle pursuit, if he knew aught of the country; but he did not think him familiar with that section of the State.

The miscreant, whose horse lay quivering in the throes of death, had escaped to the bush near at hand. As the scout's horse gained the upper level, the mounted abductor was not within view.

Again the cruel spurs were driven home, and the noble steed of Dandy Dave shot across the open approach to the ford, over the wagon-road, toward where the same wound amid the mesquites.

But a short distance had he gone, when revolver-shots whistled around the young scout's head.

Quickly jerking his own pistol, Dave instantly fired into the thicket, guided by the spurts of fire from Lanewood's revolver. The latter shot every chamber free, yet away dashed Dave unharmed; and disappeared with a taunting yell into the mesquites along the wagon-road.

No sooner had Dandy Dave disappeared, than Lance Lanewood, his features more ghastly than ever, stood along the bank of the river, on the very edge of the same, bowie in hand.

His eyes were blazing with baffled rage, as he crept toward his dead horse, determined to secure his equipments, steal an animal, and hasten on after Bob Barnes. In the intensity of his fury, he swore that he would hunt Dandy Dave to the death.

Three or four Mexicans stole cautiously from their huts, alarmed by the shots they had heard; but their fright was increased to terror when they saw the half-bent form of a man, with glittering bowie in his hand, the silvery moon revealing his cadaverous visage in all its hideousness.

With half-suppressed cries of horror, the Greasers bounded back, and closed and barred their doors.

Opening his saddle-bags, Lanewood drew out a white shirt, which he tore into strips. He then slit his sleeve and bound the bandages tightly about his wounded arm. Some of the muscles had been severed, and there was great numbness from loss of blood, but the bullet was not in the wound.

Swallowing some brandy from a flask, he stole with his equipments toward a point where he had heard the neighing of a horse. He soon reached a clear space, where he discovered three hardy mustangs.

Hastily saddling the best of the three, but not without some trouble, as the beasts were affrighted at his strange appearance, the villain sprang astride, and galloped from the bushes.

On he dashed in pursuit of Dandy Dave, or to assist Bob Barnes in defending himself, and prevent the rescue of Mamie Moreland.

And how sped the race ahead?

The captive maiden struggled desperately,

and Bob, more profane than ever, dashed madly from the vicinity of the ford.

Mamie, in one fleeting glance, saw that the horse of her unnatural uncle had been shot, and that he was fleeing to cover. She felt that she had now good grounds for hope. Could she but see the form of the scout hastening to her rescue she would feel almost free from the dread apprehensions that had tortured her.

But Bob Barnes spurred without mercy, and shot along the road; the mesquites shutting off all view of the plain. Mamie felt almost helpless in his grasp, but she made a discovery.

The bare blade of her captor's bowie projected from beneath his belt, where he had hastily thrust it.

The ruffian was in no easy frame of mind.

He was fleeing alone from the avenger, and was unacquainted with the country. All this had greatly discouraged and weakened him, and he sincerely wished himself anywhere else.

"Curses on your pretty face!" he growled, scowling at the girl who lay heavily on his arm. "If I hadn't sworn that Lanewood's revenge should be accomplished by his delivering you up to me, I should not have risked my carcass in the camp. He might have done the risky biz himself."

"He's an infernal fool, anyway! He got himself winged, his horse shot, and has thrown the whole blasted thing into my hands. He's no account."

"Now I'm in for it, I'll play the game through to the last card and sweep my share of the stakes—bet your sweet life!"

"But I don't divide you, my daisy—not much, if the court knows herself, and she's mighty sure she does! I've earned you—cuss me if I haven't! Sit up, I say, or I'll drop you into the road and break your confounded neck!"

"Danged if I know where to strike; but there's plenty of cover hereabouts, and I've got you, my beauty, got you foul. Git!"

The last word was to his horse.

The young girl was silent, but she sought to obey the command of her brutal captor by struggling to a more erect position. In doing so, she succeeded in getting the knife-blade between her wrists, the sharp edge against the cords.

Working her arms spasmodically, to her joy the cords became severed. She came near fainting when she realized that her hands were free.

Could not the blade that had been of such service to her be made an instrument of gaining her freedom—of ridding the earth of the miscreant who had her in his power?

A shudder convulsed her frame at the thought.

Oh, no! She could not do the deed.

But, as she looked once more into that repulsive and merciless face, remembered the past, and thought of the fearful future, she felt that he was not human—that he was worse than a fierce brute!

The act did not seem so repugnant now.

Could she not wound the wretch in such a manner as to render him beyond preventing her escape? Then she might jerk the horse to a halt and spring to the ground. The villain had asserted that he intended dashing into the mesquites. If he did so, then all hope was gone. There was no rescue for her. She was doomed!

These thoughts made Mamie desperate.

She feared that if she hesitated all would be lost.

Gathering her strength with the quickness of thought, she sprung forward, and jerked the knife from the belt of her captor before his startled vision.

An instant only, the bright blade flashed.

Then, with all her strength, Mamie plunged the bowie toward the breast of Bob Barnes; but, with a snarl like that of a wild beast, and an oath of astonishment, the villain swerved in the saddle, and the blade penetrated his shoulder.

The curses of Bob were terrific.

But the brave girl lost not her self command.

Drawing out the knife, she made another stab, before the ruffian could raise his arm to ward off the blow; but he ducked his head, and the keen blade came down with a flash, severing the ear of the fiercely-cursing miscreant, and leaving it hanging by a small shred of skin.

Then she hurled the knife from her, and sought to free herself; clutching the hair of her captor with one hand, and the reins with the other.

Just then, an encouraging yell sounded out from the rear, and glancing back, she perceived a horseman dashing toward them.

"It is Dandy Dave!" she exclaimed, joyfully.

"May Satan burn you and Dandy Dave, forever! I'll kill him, and humble you in the dust yet!"

So saying, the miscreant flung Mamie to the earth, and beaded his horse toward the thickets; the blood welling from his ear, and his wounded shoulder. Bob Barnes presented a horrid spectacle.

Maddened by the sight before him, Dandy Dave fired the six shots from his revolver, in rapid succession, after the cowardly ruffian; but the distance was too great to accomplish anything.

He then galloped forward, to aid the maiden, who lay upon the dust of the road, motionless.

The form of the young scout trembled. He dared not stoop to feel the pulse of the fair girl. Could it be that she had been killed?

A heavy groan came from the brave young Texan.

This broke the spell that was upon him.

He sunk to his knees, in the dusty road, and clasped the white wrist between thumb and finger.

The fair, delicate hand was covered with blood.

Dave shuddered, and softly placed his other palm on the maiden's breast. Then he sprung erect, tore off his sombrero, and turning his face heavenward, cried out, in grateful accents:

"Father, I thank Thee, from my heart and soul!"

And the chaste and silvery moon shone placidly down upon the strange and harrowing scene—shone down upon the gallant young scout, Dave Dubois, and his fate, Mamie Moreland; who, although the image of death, was slowly coming back to life—to a new life, of which she had never, as yet, even dreamed!

CHAPTER XXI.

KNOWING THE WORST AND THE BEST.

AND the same moon shone placidly down on the camp of Major Moreland, the distracted father, as upon the daughter, far away, beyond the Rio Medina; lying where she had been flung by her cowardly captor, in his impotent fury.

And just as placidly smiled Dame Luna upon Munroe Moreland, who, pale and ghastly, rode rapidly toward the Medina, and, as he supposed, his loved ones.

After parting from Dandy Dave, and indulging in the soliloquy recorded in a previous chapter, Blacksnake Bill returned at once to camp, in a very worried state of mind.

The major and his family had become very dear to the honest wagon-master, and when the former had proposed to Bill that he should remain in his service as superintendent of his ranch, he was greatly pleased, and had immediately agreed to the compact. Nothing, in the way of a situation could have better suited him.

All had gone smoothly, until the Rio Medina had been reached; the journey being a pleasant excursion to the wagon-master, compared with his usual trips. But an avalanche of misfortune had suddenly overwhelmed them, in the midst of their journey.

Dandy Dave had said nothing to Bill, of the names of the two miscreants. That such wretches could be found in any civilized, or semi-civilized country, seemed impossible to Blacksnake Bill, notwithstanding his border experience. He reasoned, and with good judgment, that plunder and robbery could not be their object; for, in that case, they would have hired a party of outlaw Mexicans, and have ambushed the train, after it had gotten beyond the San Miguel, where they would be in no danger from the rancheros, or pursuing parties.

No sooner did Bill reach a point, from which he could be seen from the wagons, than Major Moreland rushed frantically toward him; the negroes, male and female, following after.

The major's head was bandaged with a white cloth, and his eyes were wild and blood-shot.

"My child, my Mamie!" he exclaimed. "Oh, Bill, tell me of her! Where is she? If those demons have harmed a hair of her head, I'll cut them in inch pieces!"

"Speak, Bill! Do not torture me any further, for God's sake!"

Not for the world would Blacksnake Bill have added to the anguish of the old planter, by telling him that Munroe's life had been attempted, through the same source, in San Antonio; and he hoped that the major would not recall the promise made by his son, that he would return to camp before midnight, at latest.

For a moment Bill was speechless, after the agonizing appeal of his employer; for he knew not what reply to make.

Certainly he could not advance with truth any hope, or give information that would alleviate the mental misery of the major.

The latter grasped the bridle of Bill's horse with one hand, clutching the wagon-master's with the other in a vise-like grip, and again he demanded, in a hoarse, unnatural voice:

"Speak, Bill! My child—tell me of her, or my heart will break!"

"Keep kinder cool, major, an' don't worritate yerself, er yer won't be wo'th shucks ter buck ag'in' all this hyer hellishness."

"The best scout 'round ther range air on ther trail o' ther hellyuns what stole Miss Mamie. Ther or'nary cowardly coyotes what war peepin' outen ther trees hes levanted with her, dead sure an' sartain; but no 'mount o' growls an' prumbles 'bout hit won't git back yer darter. Hit won't do ter make a fuss, an' git yer idees on a stompede."

"We-uns hev gut ter face ther music, plum an' squar'; ter think what's gut ter be did, and ter do hit right off."

"One thing I'll asserwate, howsomever, major, an' hit air thet I'm ready ter afferdavy

thet Dandy Dave bu'sts up ther pair o' perrarer piruts, an' comes hummin' back with Miss Mamie, an' thet 'fore soon."

"Ef I hedn't bin dead sure I c'u'dn't keep the scout in sight—he hev'in' a boss critter, 'sides my bein' worritated 'bout you—I'd 'a' leagued 'long o' Dandy Dave ef I run my nag ter dirt."

To have seen the utter despair and anguish that were stamped upon the face of Major Moreland would have been agony to any but the most heartless.

Bill continued:

"Dandy Dave 'll overhaul 'em, an' he's a dead-shot, yer kin bet yer life, major."

The old planter looked perfectly helpless.

"Who in thunderation air' the hellyuns? An' what they gut ag'in' you, major?" asked Bill, making another attempt to turn the thoughts of his employer from his present misery.

Then, before the latter could reply, he ordered:

"Gals, git inside ther 'Chihuahua,' an' lay low! Boyees, keep yer shooters ready, an' spread yerselves. Git, lively!"

The negroes somewhat reluctantly obeyed, seeing which the wagon-master yelled:

"Ther cuss wi' ther white face air' more'n ten mile off, boyees; so yer needn't be skeered o' his comin' roun' ag'in. He'll be cold meat ef Dandy Dave gits a peep at him!"

Bill noticed that Major Moreland trembled, when he had asked who the assassins were, and the agitation of the old planter was more marked when the ghastly face was mentioned.

That there was some mystery in the whole affair, Bill decided, for he recalled the fact that the major had seemed to be paralyzed when the face had appeared.

The evident-changed emotions of the old planter convinced Blacksnake Bill, that the former well knew that cadaverous visage, and had good cause for being hopeless in regard to the rescue of his daughter.

That Major Moreland was reluctant to speak, was evident; but he could avoid the very pointed question of his wagon-master.

"The man you speak of, Bill," he said, at length, "is, I believe, the only real enemy I have on earth. Any others, are simply in his employ. To assert that he is a merciless assassin, and that the death of myself and children alone will satisfy his revenge, is to inform you of what you must have already guessed."

"I removed, from my home on the Brazos, to this section, where I believed that villain would not discover, nor molest me; and here he appears, before we have reached the Rio Leona."

"That dastard knows no mercy, and he has sworn to have a most terrible revenge, because I would not allow him to commit outrageous acts in my house, and insult myself and my children; but if harm comes to my daughter, through him, I swear that were he ten times my—"

Here the old planter checked himself abruptly, and paced back and forth, wringing his hands, while the tears ran down his face.

"This hyer won't do, major," said Bill. "I'm obleeged fer yer hev'in' tole so much, an' I wants ter say thet thar ain't any human in ther hull univarse I'd do more fer than fer you, an' Munroe, an' Miss Mamie."

"I'll foller ther hellyuns clean ter ole Mex—clean over this hyer yearth—an' ef Miss Mamie's hurted, I'll tortur' 'em by a slow fire; I'll hash 'em inter cattish-bait, whether they hes done hit er not!"

"Thank you, Bill! I know you are a true friend, and a brave and honest man. I need such men as you at the present time."

"What shall we—what can we do? I shall become insane, unless I act at once."

"How was it that you did not see those fiends carry her away?"

"When they shot you down, major, ther leetle gal, she run, an' fell onter yer, in a dead faint. Then I blazed away inter ther tree, with my shooter. I heard one o' ther hellyuns drap, an' I lunged inter ther bush, ter finish him, ef so be he warn't gone dead; but his pard hed levanted, takin' ther cuss away with him."

"Thar war bleed 'roun' thar, on ther bushes an' leaves; an' I streaked hyer, tryin' ter find 'em, an' wipe 'em out, but dang'd ef I could run in 'em!"

"Then I gut sorter s'picious-like, an' skuted back ter camp; an', major, Miss Mamie war gone! I never come nigher wiltin' inter my butes afore."

"But I jumped my nag, an' lit out ter cut 'em off et ther ford, plug' ther hellyuns, an' git ther leetle gal back; but I run ag'in' Dandy Dave, an' he tole me ter skute back ter camp, an' 'tend ter you, an' he'd sarcumvent ther cusses. Thet's ther hull biz."

"You have done nobly, Bill! How was it that Dandy Dave, as you call him, happened this way? I do not quite understand it."

"I believe—yes, I am certain I have heard of a young scout of that name, who is a very brave and skillful trailer. It is fortunate that he came, yet I am greatly puzzled."

"Dandy Dave war on ther trail o' ther hellyuns. He knows ther hull biz, somehow."

"He knowed they war comin' ter corral yer, an' he war on his way ter gi'n yer warnin'."

Thet's what he spit out, es he driv spurs, an' skuted. He's biz, from ha'r ter toe-nail, an' he'll make ther rattle, ef hit's ter be did."

"But I can't stay hyer, no more'n you, major. Reckon we-uns better hev ther gals cook some grub, git ther best nags in ther outfit under us, an' levant on ther trail, 'lowin' ther niggers ter run ther camp."

"I shell go plum lunnyfied ef I lays hyer with my brain-box in a whirl 'bout Miss Mamie."

"Nor can I remain here, Bill; but I do not know the country. But, now that you have kindly volunteered, we will prepare for the road. I feel already like a different man. I was frantic before you arrived; but your confidence in this young scout, and my knowledge of him by reputation, gives me hope."

Food was soon prepared and placed in their saddle-bags, and Major Moreland with Blacksnake Bill, one hour after the latter had returned to camp, galloped to the ford, and crossed the river, knowing then that they were on the right trail.

More than this, they soon knew that the horse of one of the miscreants had been shot by the young scout. This proved that Dave had come within view of the abductors, and gave the strongest assurance that he would rescue Mamie.

And at about the same time that the captive girl gazed over the shoulder of Bob Barnes, discovering the young Texan galloping to her rescue, and cried out in her relief and joy, the same words, in effect, sprung from the lips of her father, in heartfelt gratitude and hopefulness.

Dandy Dave, they both saw, was in a fair way for keeping the vow that he had taken.

Heaven's justice had not slept, after all.

CHAPTER XXII.

THUS STRANGELY MET.

THE noble steed of Dandy Dave stood panting laboriously and covered with the dust of the road.

The limbs of the animal quivered, testifying to the great speed it had maintained from the ford.

The young scout sunk to the earth and tenderly lifted the beautiful maiden in his arms.

Thus he held her, both standing in the moonlight; her head upon his shoulder, and her long hair vailing his arm, and hanging to his waist.

Then he cast a suspicious glance down the road, when, but a few yards away, he discovered a glittering object in the dust. Striding quickly to the spot, he saw that it was a bowie-knife.

And more than that he saw.

The blade was covered with blood!

The young scout then glanced at the hand of the maiden. Not until then did he recall the blood-stains which he had noticed at the first.

Dandy Dave became pale as a corpse.

He reeled like a drunken man, his eyes filled with a look of horror, and agony of soul, that was terrible. He appeared as if stricken with death.

At once the conviction flashed upon him that the miscreant had stabbed his captive, and then hurled her to the earth. This seemed only characteristic of such a pair of dastardly ruffians.

It was fearful even to think of.

No longer did a sound pass the young girl's lips, nor was there a sign of recovery.

Had she relapsed into her former state, or was she dead? The thought moved Dave to action.

He could not stand such suspense. It was worse than the tortures inflicted by the Apaches upon their white captives. Madly he rushed to his horse and tore his canteen from the saddle, and the blanket from the cantele, meanwhile supporting Mamie in his left arm and holding her to his breast.

Bounding into the mesquites, Dave soon reached a small "open," where he spread the blanket, and placed the senseless maiden upon it; bathing her head, and giving a peculiar whistle as he did, which caused his horse to advance from the road to the "open." The animal was still panting from its terrible race from San Antonio, after the previous long day's travel beneath the burning sun.

The young scout poured water between the lips of the unconscious girl, after washing the dust from her face. Such angelic beauty had never before blessed his vision. It transformed him at first sight into almost another being.

Tenderly, as if she were formed of fragile glass, Dave lifted Mamie upon his knee. He then saw that there was no blood on the blanket and a second glance showed none upon her clothing.

Only that one hand was stained with blood.

Gently he lifted the little hand, upon which, sparkling amid the crimson stains, he saw a diamond, set in a circlet of gold. This caused a pang to shoot through his heart, such as he had never before felt.

What was it to him?

It would have been nothing, a few moments previous.

It was now more than earth—more than life!

But his face suddenly brightened. The ring was worn upon the least finger of all.

Surely Dandy Dave had met his fate.

He slowly returned the maiden to her former position, and then, still keeping his gaze fixed upon her, he walked slowly to the side of his horse, and took a flask of brandy from his saddle-bags.

Why had he not thought of this before?

Quickly he returned, and kneeling, again lifted Mamie to a reclining position. Holding her neck in the hollow of his left arm—her pale face still bearing a strange expression of mingled terror, relief and joy—the young man placed the flask to her lips, allowing a few drops at a time to trickle between her pearly teeth.

Soon a convulsive shudder shook her frame, her breathing became perceptible, and her face seemed to have a hue less pallid.

Then, in a state of semi-unconsciousness, the fair girl nestled more closely to the breast of Dandy Dave, her rescuer and protector.

But this could not, must not last.

There was danger in the air.

The assassins might steal upon him, shoot him, and regain their captive.

No sooner did this thought occur to the young scout, than the sound of hoofs struck upon his keen ears; coming from down the road, in the ford.

Instantly Dave was himself again.

His eyes blazed with a furious light; and recalling the fact that, for the first time in his border experience, he had neglected to reload his revolver, he placed the fair girl again upon the blanket.

Springing to a standing position, Dandy Dave strode to his horse's head, and spoke low and soothingly to the animal; the noble steed rubbing its head on its master's shoulder, and nibbling at his clothing.

He then, with alacrity, reloaded his revolver.

Nearer and nearer approached the night-rider.

Nearer the sounds came, until, suddenly, the horseman jerked his beast to a halt, at the very point where, the scout knew, the bloody knife lay.

"Hell and fury! Has the infernal fool allowed himself to be overhauled, when he could have taken to the bush at any point? This is his bowie, and there is blood on the blade.

"Can it be that that devil, Dandy Dave, has wounded Bob, and rescued the girl? Curse that scout, I'll have his heart's blood yet!"

These words came distinctly to Dave's ears, and a scornful smile lit up his determined face, as he stepped nearer the road, revolver in hand.

Lance Lanewood, you were never before as near the death you deserved, as at that minute.

But, one whom you had sought to injure most deeply was the means of giving you a brief respite.

The moving of her form to a position on the blanket, fully aroused Mamie Moreland, and she opened her eyes in bewilderment. Then she heard the voice of Lanewood, and recognized it.

Her heart bounded to her throat, as she raised herself to a sitting posture, and her blood rushed back to its natural channels.

Before her, not ten paces distant, she saw a noble-looking young man, standing beside his horse—an animal that seemed worthy of him.

The maiden could not see the stranger's face, but she was confident that he was handsome.

She knew that he was brave and daring.

She knew that he was the one of whom her abductor had spoken, as having saved her brother's life; and she now felt that he had saved her from a fate worse than death.

Mamie Moreland knew that Dandy Dave was before her. Her heart, as well as her eyes told her this.

There was a strong desire within her, to rush toward, and cling to him. There was an attraction toward him, that was beyond her control, and she felt not like resisting it.

All the near past was recalled, and she shuddered with horror. Then she smiled with relief and joy, as she raised herself more erect.

But she felt weak and faint. She had a dull pain in her head, and she lay down again.

Now she perceived that she lay upon a blanket—his blanket. He, then—Dandy Dave—had borne her in his arm from the road.

She began to scorn herself for having fainted. She must have lost prestige, in the eyes of this brave scout, by so doing.

Such men admire fortitude and bravery.

Thus she thought, but it was for a moment only.

Then she arose to her feet, and stole toward her rescuer, who now stood, revolver in hand.

The horse tossed up its head, its great eyes fixed upon her in startled wonder; but the scout noticed not the beast. His attention was drawn toward the road; and, with stealthy movement, he stepped forward. With a light bound, the maiden reached him, and grasped his arm.

Suddenly he wheeled around.

In his fury, and mad desire to maim the miscreant, Dandy Dave had forced every other feeling to the background, although so recently

ruled by opposite emotions. He now lowered his revolver.

Two small hands rested upon his shoulder, and two pleading eyes gazed into his own.

"Dandy Dave," whispered the maiden.

She could say no more.

Soft, as the flutter of a butterfly's wing, had come that whisper upon the air.

"Mamie Moreland!"

These two words came not in a whisper from the young man's lips; but in a low, silvery voice, modulated by the intensity of his emotion. Why should he whisper her name?

He felt that he could defy the world—that he was king of all mankind, or would be more than that, did the love of the maiden before him ever approach the borders of the adoration he felt for her.

All this came now upon him, and ruled his whole being to the exclusion of all else.

He thrust his revolver into its scabbard, and impulsively clasped the fair girl in his arms, his heart fluttering like a wild bird in a cage struggling to fly nearer to its mate.

With a blush Mamie's head sunk forward upon Dandy Dave's shoulder. No language could have revealed their emotions more plainly than did every look and expression and act.

Each knew that the other loved.

Each knew that, henceforth, they could be happy only in the company of the other!

"Satan burn that Dandy Dave! He has run Bob into the mesquites, after wounding him.

"Which of them has the girl? Curse me, if I don't wade in blood before I'll quit the game! Here's Bob's trail, and, by Heavens! I'll follow. Death to all who bear the name of Moreland!—always excepting myself.

"Git! you prancing, bucking fiend of a mustang—git! I'll shoot you, when I've done with you, for bursting open my wound!"

Dave and Mamie clung to each other, while Lance Lanewood, beyond the screen of mesquites, growled these words.

Then the young scout lifted the maiden upon his saddle, while he said:

"Sit there and fear nothing until I return. If anything should go wrong, my good horse will bear you safe to the ford and camp."

"Do not follow that man, I beg of you!" pleaded Mamie. "Let him go and join his confederate. Both of them are wounded, and can do no more harm."

"I shall not go beyond the road," was the reply. "But who wounded the other miscreant? I saw his knife, and feared that he had stabbed you."

"I did," said the maiden reluctantly. "He was riding into the mesquites, and then I should have been doomed. Do you blame me, Dave?"

"Blame you! Why, you are the bravest and noblest girl under the sun! I did not dream that you were so daring!"

"But I'll return to you in a few moments."

And kissing her hand, Dandy Dave sprang into the thicket, while Mamie sat watching the whisking branches where he had disappeared, and listening intently, her lips apart, and the fingers of her blood-stained hand buried in the mane of the young Texan's horse.

The noble animal seemed proud of its strange burden, for it rubbed its nose upon and nibbled at the skirt of the maiden's dress.

CHAPTER XXIII.

LOVE'S YOUNG DREAM.

DANDY DAVE reached the border of the mesquites, in time to see the bobbing head of Lance Lanewood, above the thicket on the opposite side of the road; but the miscreant soon disappeared in the higher bushes beyond.

There was no trail visible at this point, and Lanewood had sufficient knowledge in reading "sign" to determine what had occurred: except that his confederate had been wounded, and he was following the drops of blood along the cattle-path, over which Bob Barnes had galloped.

The young scout, apprehending no further danger, decided at once to send Mamie back to the camp, and her father. If all was safe on the Medina, Dave resolved that he would then trail the wounded dastards, and that both should die by the rope.

He, therefore, quickly returned to the little "open," and reported what he had seen. Then he procured his canteen, and said:

"Now, Miss Moreland, extend your right hand, and allow me to wash off the contaminating blood of that fiend, while you tell me how you succeeded in getting possession of his knife, and accomplishing what you did."

"Why do you address me as Miss Moreland?"

This she said, in an assumed offended tone.

"I would not," was the reply, "address you in any other way than as a life-long friend. My life is at your service, now and ever; and Dandy Dave speaks no idle words, or flattery."

"On the impulse of the moment, when rejoiced beyond measure at having been instrumental in defeating the plans of those demons, and being bewildered by your loveliness—stop! Hear me out; I am speaking the solid truth.

"I repeat, I was so beside myself, at your recovery, that I did call you 'Mamie.' Very familiar it was, upon so short an acquaintance, and I beg your pardon. But I am to be advised by you in all things, if you will condescend to do so; and I now await your decision as to our future mode of addressing each other. How shall it be?"

The young scout released the hand, from which he had removed the blood-stains; but the fingers again closed about his own, as she said:

"Call me 'Mamie;' for who should thus address me, if not you, who have saved my life—saved me from a horrible fate?"

"Yes, from a fate, the mere thought of which causes me to shudder—you, to whom I owe eternal gratitude and friendship, for rescuing my brother Munroe from death."

"How came you to know this?" demanded Dave, in the utmost wonder and amazement.

"I gained the knowledge from the conversation of my captors—they who shot down my poor father before my eyes," said the young girl.

"From what I heard, I have been led to hope that he is not yet dead. Tell me—oh, tell me! Does he yet live, and where is my brother? I heard a horse galloping down the river toward our camp, as I was being carried away, bound and gagged."

"I heard those wretches say that it was yours, and from that moment I had hope of rescue—that hope resting with Dandy Dave."

"Do relieve my mind! If you have the least regard for me, tell me; be the news bad or good. Speak! Does my father live, or is he, as I at first feared, dead?"

"Major Moreland was only stunned. It was a glance shot on the head, very much the same as your brother received, the second time an attempt was made on his life."

"Munroe is at the Plaza House, in San Antonio. He went, after he was hurt, to see the hanging of the Mexicans, who had been bribed to kill him by his so-called uncle."

"He was not able to witness the revolting sight, and I laid him in the mesquites. Those two villains rode hither to shoot the two Mexicans they had hired, to prevent them from exposing their employers at the last moment."

"They did so; but your brother saw them, and recognized one of them as your uncle. This caused Munroe to faint away, as he had lost much blood. I learned from him some facts, which caused me to hasten to the Medina, and your camp. I knew that the miscreants had galloped to the south, and that their object was to kill your father, and capture you."

"Lanewood, as he calls himself, intended to claim the property as next of kin, when the Morelands were put out of the way. Although they did their utmost to accomplish their fiendish object, you all three still live."

The young scout paused for a moment, and then said, looking into the fair girl's eyes:

"You love me, Mamie Moreland?"

The reply, though not audible, was understood.

"Then, hear me!" he said. "Here, beneath the silvery moon, beneath the starry dome, which has been my only shelter for years—here, amid the mesquites, where, but a few moments since, I was first blessed by meeting with you, and so strangely—here I swear that my life shall be dedicated to you!"

"My love shall burn and blaze, like the southern sun, for you and yours. My hate shall be as dark as the clouds of the Mexique Gulf, and my revenge as swift and deadly as the lightning that darts from those clouds, striking down all who would seek to injure a Moreland! You know that I mean all this."

"We have been led together; we were fated to meet, and to love each other. It was our destiny, and from my soul's depths I am thankful for the happiness that is mine."

Blissful as was such an interview, Dandy Dave did not entirely lose his judgment and consideration of more matter of fact affairs.

Well he knew that the poor maiden had suffered, in both mind and body, most terribly, and his knowledge of this banished all selfishness.

He acted now in his characteristic manner.

Lifting the fair girl from the saddle, and placing her upon her feet, he said, as he gazed into her tear-dimmed eyes and caressingly smoothed her hair:

"Mamie mine, I confess I did have some suspicions of the true state of affairs."

"What do you refer to?"

"You have spoken of being excited. I see now that I was careless, and left my flask beside you. When you recovered you must have taken advantage of my position—I was then turned toward the road—and helped yourself to some brandy. Is not that so?"

Mamie's face turned scarlet, and she looked into that of the young scout in wonder and some irritation—certainly greatly confused, as he could not help observing.

Dave smiled, with a knowing glance.

"Yes," she admitted; "I really was very weak, and I do not think I could have reached your side had I not taken a swallow of the liquor."

"That accounts for all," said Dave, with assumed regret and great disappointment.

"I must hear you speak your mind when you are sober; but I shall blow my brains out if you so much as change the intonation, inflection or softness one iota."

"What do you mean?" was the puzzled query.

The face of the young girl was filled with perplexity and a strange blending of other emotions, as she dashed the tears from her eyes and looked reprovingly into Dave's face.

Catching her up in his arms, and carrying her toward the outspread blanket, he replied:

"I am a mean brute—that's what I mean! But you must bear in mind that I have not been much accustomed to ladies' society, especially to those of your station and education."

"I wished only to break the spell that caused us to repudiate everything else; for we must leave this charmed spot, which I shall ever hold in reverence."

"I'll pre-empt this section of land, as sure as I'm known as Dandy Dave. I shall fence this 'open' in first, making a billock in its center with the dust of the road where your fair form lay when I first beheld you. No hoofs must ever spurn the soil upon which you have reposed."

"What a foolish fellow you are!" said Mamie laughing so much that the young man knew she would become more debilitated, did he not change the current of her thoughts.

"I believe I am losing my wits," he said; "for we should have been on the road long since. However, I hope that neither of us will have cause to regret the moments we have passed in this lonely chaparral together, or the words here spoken, except my rude ones."

"You have raised my mental spirits into the seventh heaven of delight; but, Mamie, you cannot deny having lowered my spirits in this flask. And, besides that, you drank alone, which is decidedly un-Texan; and I shall now shame you by asking you to join me in a toast. Here's the bottle. Drink, and form the toast with your own ruby lips."

The maiden's face was radiant with smiles.

It seemed to her that she and Dandy Dave had been friends all their lives.

The young scout was now endeavoring to bring to the front the fair girl's natural sprightliness, and banish the depression which still lingered upon her mind. She felt assured of this, and appreciated his kind motive.

Taking the proffered flask, she said:

"My toast is—'Your future; may you ever be happy!'"

"Drink, Mamie!" exclaimed the young man; "for if that is your sincere wish I shall most certainly be happy, since my happiness depends upon you alone."

"Drink! For you need a stimulant now if ever. We must start at once on our return to the Rio Medina."

"The joy, relief, and happiness which I have experienced here must not prevent my thoughts from going back to those who are tortured with anguish on your account. Now I know what it must be to suffer for a loved one in danger."

"Ye gods! I'd turn the world over—I'd cut the miscreants into saddle-strings, if they captured you again!"

Little did Dandy Dave dream how soon those words would be recalled by him—how soon he would really know what such anguish meant—when one dearer to him than life should again be in the power of inhuman wretches who had sworn to make her their debased, degraded, and cringing slave!

But we anticipate.

Mamie tasted the brandy and returned the flask to the young scout, who, waving it gracefully, also imbibed.

Then Dave quickly secured his blanket to his saddle and sprung into it, saying:

"Come, my poor darling! I'll soon restore you to your distracted father's arms, and then go and bring Munroe."

"It will be a happy reunion—happy, indeed, for me to witness."

"It pains me to think of the way I have treated my noble beast"—this he said as he stroked the horse's mane—"but, White Stocking, old boy, I'll not forget your service this night, and neither will Mamie."

"Indeed I shall not," said the young girl, rubbing the nose of the gallant steed; "he is indeed a magnificent animal. We owe a great deal to this fleet horse of yours, and we must not forget him; whether misery or happiness be our own destiny."

"Don't mention misery again, Mamie! Come to my protecting arms, and we'll be off!"

Stooping down, Dave gently lifted the fair girl before him in the saddle, having placed a *serape*, or Mexican blanket about her form, she reclining in the same manner, as when a captive, upon the left arm of Dandy Dave.

But, with what different feelings this return ride was made, we may imagine.

Like a child being rocked to sleep by its mother, thus reclined Mamie Moreland in the protecting arms of the brave young scout; while White Stocking, in an easy lope, proceeded along the dusty road, toward the Rio Medina.

CHAPTER XXIV.

TRAPPED.

LANCE LANEWOOD allowed his horse to amble along slowly, looking, as he rode along, for the blood-drops, which were the only visible evidences to him, that he was on the trail of his confederate.

He had been too furious and excited to examine the "sign" with care where Mamie Moreland had been flung from the horse; and, had he done so, he would have been at a loss to understand what had actually occurred in the struggle.

The path taken by Bob Barnes was hard trod, and Lance could not determine whether more than one horse had passed over it. His arm pained him badly, and the wound was now bleeding afresh.

Every time that he dismounted, to ascertain if he was on the right trail, he groaned in agony.

It was some time before he was sufficiently calm to reason upon the situation of affairs, and this was at length brought about, by his twitching the knife of his pard from between the strings of his blanket roll, to examine it, and satisfy himself that it was really the weapon which Bob usually carried.

Then, and not until then, did the real truth flash upon the miscreant's mind.

"Hell and fury!" he cried out, in madness and amazement; "I was an idiot not to have known at once, that none but Bob Barnes could have used his own bowie."

"Bully for Bob! He's had a fierce hand-to-hand fight with that devil, Dandy Dave; but he has wounded the scout badly, and is following him to finish him. What a fool I was, not to have seen the true state of affairs before!"

"Bob is true-blue every time, when it comes to the pinch; although he does grumble a good deal between tight scrapes. But, hold on, Lance!"

Here a new idea seemed to strike him.

"I may be on the trail alone. Bob may have gone, with the girl, in another direction; and I may be the only one after Dandy Dave. But, all right, anyway! I'll have my revenge, and plug him."

"But, hello! Bob knew I'd get a horse in some way. Why did he lay low, and wait for me?"

"This looks bad. Perhaps he don't intend to join me. He's got the girl, and she's a beauty; so he may intend to put out for Mexico. He could work that racket, and he's the man to do it. I'll bet that's his game!"

At this moment the horse of Lanewood reared back, with a snort of fright, and trembled in every limb.

"Satan burn you, Lance Lanewood! I've a good mind to bore your brain; and cuss me if I wouldn't, if I knew I could get out of this labyrinth of thorns!"

As these words were uttered, out from the thicket sprang Bob Barnes, a horrible object, covered with blood; his severed ear still hanging by a shred of skin, and the blood from that and his shoulder flowing freely. In this plight, he suddenly appeared.

The astonishment of his pard may be imagined.

At first he supposed that Dandy Dave had darted into the path, and that his doom had come; and when he recognized the voice of his confederate in crime, although so fearfully unnatural, and recalling his own late utterances, spoken aloud in soliloquy, he was little less anxious on his own account than had it really been the young scout.

At once, Lance saw that Bob had been terribly mutilated; and he began to believe that the maiden had been rescued by Dandy Dave, who had half-killed her captor, in taking her from him.

Lance realized that he was in a most dangerous position; that Bob was as furious as a wild beast, at having been thus maimed, and at the words he must have heard from himself.

He cursed himself for a fool, for having spoken aloud.

Most certainly, Bob had good cause to hate him, for having been the means of bringing him into such a country, and among such dangers.

Thus the villain thought and reasoned, keeping his horse, but with difficulty, faced toward Bob; in order to shield himself from an expected bullet.

Bob Barnes glared at him, with bloodshot eyes, most murderously; his revolver held in his hand.

Fertile was the brain of the plotter, and but a moment was he dazed into speechlessness.

He soon saw a way out of the scrape.

Lance knew Bob, clear through his weak points as well as his strong ones.

Betraying not the slightest fear or concern in voice or manner, he exclaimed, in assumed anger:

"I've found you at last, have I? Cuss me, if I didn't believe you'd left me, wounded, to die in these infernal chaparrals! What, in the fiend's name, have you done to yourself, and where is the girl? Answer me, can't you?"

"Have you been drunk, and cut yourself in

an attempt at suicide? It looks that way, for I found your knife, all blood, back in the road."

"I've lost a couple of quarts of gore myself, I believe; but hanged if you don't look worse off than I am. Where's the girl, I say?"

Lance knew that Bob would realize that he was greatly to blame, if Mamie had escaped, and this, Lance was confident, had been the case.

"Devil fly away with the infernal wild-cat! And curse the day I ever put foot on Texas soil!"

"Curse you, too, Lance Lanewood, for getting me into this scrape. Don't you see I'm marked for life? Don't you see my ear has been slashed off?"

Bob fairly shrieked out the last questions.

"Yes, yes! I observe, Bob; but I'll sew it on, and patch it up. I've got silk, and needles and plaster, I reckon. But the girl—where is she? You didn't allow her to get away?"

"By St. Iago! I should say, from appearances and feelings, that she 'got away' with me, and from me, later on. Didn't you see her corpse in the road, where you picked up my bowie?"

Lance had now dismounted, and was securing his horse to a mesquite. He saw there was no longer any danger to be apprehended from Bob.

"Not I," he said. "I saw no signs of her, or of anybody else. What do you mean? Did you kill her? You do not think you can make me believe she stabbed you in that way?"

As he spoke he passed his brandy flask to Bob. The fury of the latter had somewhat subsided, and when the flask was once at his lips, he drank with eagerness and very evident satisfaction.

"I don't care a cuss whether you believe it, or not; but it's a fact, nevertheless."

"So you thought I'd gone back on you, and was going to marry the gal and then come in for the ducats, after you got settled nicely?"

"I tell you, Lance, she's a double-clawed wild-cat, with three rows of teeth! I'd rather marry a cyclone, a West India tornado, with a Gulf thunder-storm for a mother, and take the old folks into my family, than hitch to that beautiful blizzard!"

Again Bob Barnes raised the flask to his lips; his wild eyes and blood-smeared face giving him a most horrible appearance.

Even his pard shuddered; but he appeared not to notice him, for he knew that Bob had no idea that he presented such a repulsive spectacle.

To say that Lanewood was astonished at Bob's statements, would be putting it in mild terms.

"Give me the particulars," he said, at length, "and I'll get ready to fix you up all right again."

Lance prudently assumed his natural manner, even repressing every outward sign of what he was suffering from the pain of his own wound, in order not to excite Bob more than he could avoid.

The situation of affairs was exceedingly mixed, not to say dangerous.

Something must be done, or all was lost.

But, first, the wounds of both must be attended to.

Lance felt sure that Bob's ear, if sewed on, would never grow to the flesh again; but he feared to tell him this. He must make his pard think he was all right, and keep him well supplied with brandy; of which he had a good supply, but unknown to Bob. Once "fixed up," they would plan defensive and offensive operations.

He would play the game out to the bitter end.

While he bathed the blood from Bob's head, stitched the ear in place, applying plaster and salve, and bandaging it, the latter told his story; somewhat twisted in his own favor, as a matter of course.

"Then that infernal scout came near corraling you, did he?" asked Lance, as Bob ended.

"You just can bet! I got away by a scratch, for I couldn't have fought a cotton-tailed rabbit—not even a spring chicken, unless it was a broiled one!"

Bob Barnes was fast getting back to his natural state of mind, through liberal potations of Lance's brandy.

"And you really believe you killed the girl, by throwing her from the horse?"

"I reckon she was killed for a while at any rate. She lay stiff and still, and never moved, or so much as breathed."

"Just so. Well, Bob, I don't believe she was hurt, worth a cent!"

"The deuce, you don't!"

"The deuce, I don't. After slicing you up in that manner, and the sudden transition from furious, murderous madness and hopelessness to relief and joy, as Dandy Dave appeared—this caused her to faint; and, as it wouldn't hurt her half so much to fall, when in that state as in her senses, I reckon she's all O. K."

"Yes, and then that cursed scout ran into the bushes with her, to avoid me; as he must have heard my horse coming at a gallop."

"It will be some time, in the state she is in, before they will reach the ford; for he will not

hurry his horse. I believe we can cut them off, and win the game yet, notwithstanding the past blunders and failures.

"What do you say, old boy? It is big stakes we are playing for."

"I don't care a continental cuss for the stakes. It is revenge I'm after now, and that's what has spurred you on, from the first, more than the ducats, a blamed sight!"

"I ain't no fool, I reckon! Curse me, if I don't hurt somebody, next time!"

"If I get a clutch on that girl again, she'll need a heap of help to get away from me; and I'll grind her into the dust. She shall curse the mother that bore her, before I'm through with her. Satan burn me, if I ain't after revenge now, myself!"

"We know she's a keen one now, for she has proved that, Bob, by the manner in which she cut herself free, and handled your knife. Yes, she is game, evidently."

"But I see you are getting around to biz."

"You talk to suit me, old pard, and we'll go in, and win the game, or—"

At that moment, the snake-like coils and nooses of lassoes shot from the bordering mesquites; hissing through the air, as they came.

The next instant, Bob Barnes and Lance Lanewood were encircled by the rawhide ropes, tightly drawn, and binding their arms to their sides.

This drew shrieks and groans of agony and terror from them, as the lassoes caused great pain from their wounds.

Then, out from the thorny thickets, on all sides, sprung a circle of low-browed, swarthy, and villainous-looking Mexicans, with loud cries of exultation, and murderous hate.

"*Demonios Gringos!*"

"*Diablos Americanos!*"

"*Perfidious Texanos!*"

Such outcries filled the air, chilling the blood of the dastard plotters, and striking terror to their hearts!

CHAPTER XXV.

A COVENANT IN CRIME.

LANCE LANEWOOD and Bob Barnes lay in the middle of the "open," perfectly helpless, the lasso nooses binding their arms to their sides.

Even the red, bloated face of Bob had become ghastly, while Lance appeared more cadaverous than before.

The Rio Grande marauders stood, in a circle, around them. Brutal, degraded, and revengeful was that bandit horde, full a score in number; and the captives well knew that no Texan or American ever escaped death, when once in their clutches. At such a distance from the Rio Grande, the outlaws could not be hampered with prisoners, and so gave them short shrift, and a long rope.

Suddenly one of the Greasers stepped forward, and snatching the sombrero from Bob's head, tore the bandage away from his mutilated ear; causing him to howl with pain, and the wound to bleed afresh.

The Mexicans glanced around the circle, in surprise.

Instantly the wounds of both men were critically examined by their captors, in some amazement.

Hope began to revive in Lanewood's breast.

An idea flashed through his fertile brain.

He knew that Dandy Dave was feared and hated by the bandit Mexicans; that the young scout had been the means of the capture and hanging of not a few of their number.

But, before he could frame a speech, one of the outlaws asked, in a peremptory manner:

"Why are you here in the chaparrals? Who cut you? Speak quick, for we have no time to spare! We must ride fast after we hang you."

"You will not hang us, when you hear our story," said Lance, with an air of confidence.

"We have had a fight with one of your worst foes; for I believe you are the trusted followers of Cortina el Ranchero."

A murmur of surprise ran round the circle.

Bob Barnes gazed into the face of his pard, with the utmost astonishment; for by the manner of Lanewood, he knew that his plotting pard had been, by no means, frightened entirely out of his wits.

"Who is this man whom you think is the enemy of Cortina?" asked the Mexican leader.

"He is one who has hanged and shot many of your men," was the somewhat evasive reply.

"How do you know that we are Cortina's men? Answer! who is the man you speak of?"

Lanewood saw it would not do to delay an immediate explanation. He resolved on a bold move.

He had, when in Lavaca, bidden Antonio Corrillo send one of his comrades toward the Rio Grande, and if any band of Cortina's force were met with, to ask assistance from them in capturing the wagon-train.

These had been Antonio's instructions, did the latter ascertain, upon arriving at the Alamo City, that he could not raise a force sufficient to insure the capture of the train, without losing a portion of his followers in the attempt.

As a drowning man clutches at a straw, so Lanewood bethought him if that, possibly Antonio had sent a comrade as directed, and that

this party were on their way to co-operate with him.

"I believe you are followers of Juan N. Cortina, and I would not say this were I not your friend; and I can prove that I am. Senors, the man, or devil, to whom we owe our wounds, is Dandy Dave!"

Curses, loud and deep, came from the excited bandits.

"*Demonio Dandy Dave!*"

"Let us find him, and split his heart!"

Lance Lanewood had made a point, and he made ready for another shot; first, however, resolving to prove to Bob, that his words had been such as to win the favor of the marauders.

"Senor Capitan," he said, "when you loosen these lassoes, we can converse more easily. This is not a very cordial reception to get at the hands of one's friends; but, as you were ignorant of our character and intentions, you are, or were, excusable."

"I am now about to prove to you that we are your friends. Unloose the lassoes!"

Although the last words were given more in command than as if asking a favor, the bandit leader made a gesture, and at once the two captives were relieved of the rawhide ropes.

"Now, senor," said the outlaw, "speak! The moon rolls fast. What are your names?"

"This is Senor Barnes, and I, at your service, am Senor Lanewood. If I mistake not, you have heard of us. Were you not induced to come toward San Antonio, by a messenger from my friends, Antonio Corrillo and Pedro Galindo?"

With cries of surprise and relief, the Greasers pressed forward, in imitation of their chief, who had immediately grasped the hands of each of the strangers, and expressed himself as the situation required; saying, with the most friendly manner and intonation:

"Good, Senor Lanewood! You are right. We came at the request of Antonio and Pedro. Where are they, senor? We are ready to attack the wagon-train of Major Moreland. *Camarados!* Lead in the mustangs. *Viva Cortina!*"

Lanewood was about to explain, in regard to the hanging of his hired assassins; but he checked himself just in time. He realized that he had been standing on the brink of death.

Did he now speak the truth, the bandits would probably hang him and Bob for having been the means of bringing the Mexicans, who had been slain at the Bull's Head, and those who had been hanged, to their death. To reveal this, would render the outlaws furious, and the lives of himself and his pard would not be worth a picayune.

It was lucky for the two villains, that Lance Lanewood bethought himself of the effect of a true statement, in connection with the events in San Antonio, in time.

Both were now assisted to their feet by the Greasers, two of whom came up with some pulp of the prickly pear, which they applied to the wounds of Bob and Lance—the former, the most rejoiced and astonished man on earth at the time, and unable to do anything but gaze at his pard, in admiration and gratitude.

"Senor Capitan," said Lanewood, who gave evidence of being in great pain, "please to get me a flask of brandy, from my saddle-bags."

"There are several there, and, I reckon, enough to give all a drink."

This was received with acclamations.

"*Viva, Senor Lanewood!*" was the cry that came from all sides.

Lance was now not a little perplexed, in what manner to tell the remainder of his story.

It was for this reason that he feigned agony, and called for the brandy; to enable him to have time to think, and to decide on the best answer to give the bandit leader.

Nothing of this sort, however, was revealed by his countenance. He was too much of an adept at villainy, not to be able to control his facial muscles, on a moment's notice.

A flask was passed to him at once, and holding the same upward for a moment, he cried out:

"Here's long life, health, and prosperity to Cortina el Ranchero!"

It was apparent that the sentiment was a popular one in that assemblage.

Loud *risas* filled the air.

The Greasers feared no interruption, dreaded no foe, in that lonely chaparral.

But the time had come for Lance Lanewood's explanation, and the wily miscreant had it all ready, cut and dried.

"Now, Senor Capitan, and friends all; listen!" he began. "The wagon-train of Major Moreland is encamped on the Rio Medina, in the timber; or nearly inclosed by timber."

"We can capture it there, or wait until they get beyond the San Miguel; just as you choose. But, to-night, senors, we must seek revenge. Pleasure first, and then business!"

"Dandy Dave will soon cross the Medina at the Pleasanton Ford; and we can, if we choose, get there ahead of him."

"Your merciless enemy, who has pulled a lariat to choke out the life of many of your comrades must himself hang, to-night."

"He with some of his ranger friends, attacked us. We had stolen Moreland's daughter,

when she was out riding; and they took her from us."

"We killed four of them, but at last had to run for life; as we had no time to reload our revolvers. There are but three remaining alive, and their horses were fagged with the long run to rescue the girl."

"Although my comrade and myself seek revenge for our wounds, we give you Dandy Dave and his pards. All we ask, is the girl. Then, we can go for the wagon-train."

"If we have the girl, we can lead the major and his men away from the wagons, and then capture the train. It will probably come on to the San Miguel, in charge of the negroes. The wagons are full of plunder, which will be all yours, capitan, to divide among your men."

"As to Pedro and Antonio, they will join us within twenty-four hours. They are now seeking the son of Major Moreland, in San Antonio. I gave them five hundred pesos to kill him."

"I hate the Morelands. They are my enemies, but you are all my friends. You shall take to Cortina, your chief, much plunder."

"What say you, capitan? Shall we start at once? We can secrete ourselves in the mesquites near the ford, and pounce upon the young scout, Dandy Dave."

"I am ready, and so is my comrade, although we are suffering from our wounds."

"*Viva Senor Lanewood! Viva Senor Barnes!*"

Thus yelled the marauders.

"Mount, and away!" ordered their leader, as he sprung into his saddle.

"*Diablo Dandy Dave!* He shall die the death of a dog! *Vamonos*, soldiers of the Bravo!"

And, winding like a serpent along the chaparral paths, in a long line—riding singly from necessity, and guided by a Texas-Mexican, who well knew the way—on went the horde of cut-throats, toward the Rio Medina.

In their midst, rode Lance Lanewood and Bob Barnes; the latter taking frequent "pulls" at his brandy-flask, and greatly elated at the turn affairs had taken, from expected death—an ignominious death—to life and security, with a good prospect for fulfilling his oath of revenge. He no longer entertained any anger toward his pard—only respect and admiration, for he realized that, had not Lance followed his trail, he would have been captured by the Greasers and hanged, for, unlike Lance, he would not have thought of any way of escape.

As for the latter, he was most exultant at his success. Revenge seemed within his grasp. He would win the game, as he had sworn to do.

He was proud of himself—indeed, filled with wonder—at having when in deadly peril maintained his coolness, controlled his mind, and remembered every point that would favor them.

Not a word could have been omitted, not a word added that might have made his statement useless, and led to death by the rope.

Thus on, wound through the mesquites the bandits and the merciless miscreants, bent on murder and on plunging a beautiful maiden into an overwhelming sea of misery to which death would have been a mercy!

CHAPTER XXVI.

"AS MOONLIGHT IS TO SUNLIGHT."

ALONG the dusty road, at an easy gait, went White Stocking, with his double burden.

The youthful pair conversed in low tones, and although the route was anything but a pleasant one, it seemed Paradise to Dandy Dave and Mamie Moreland.

Never having been, to any extent, beyond her plantation home, the maiden was not well versed in worldly ways and customs; she, therefore, saw no impropriety in giving her entire confidence to the one who had done so much for her and hers—one who was, himself, so honest and confiding. He was everything to her.

Little cared the young girl whether Dave was rich or poor.

Very possibly, had not the young man been handsome and striking in appearance, he would not thus have taken her heart by storm.

But, throughout the journey, the scout lost not his habitual watchfulness; but swept, with his keen eyes, the bordering mesquites.

Was he not the guardian of one who had become, within a few short hours, dearer to him than all the world beside? He felt that all his past life had been little more than a blank; that he had just begun to realize what existence was, and why this beautiful world had been created.

Yes, this young girl was all the world to him now; and the world that he had known was most decidedly a changed one.

Yet, as he rode onward—Mamie, at his request, lying passive and silent in his arms—less agreeable thoughts would, now and then, pass through his mind. He knew that

his own social position would not be considered equal to that of the Morelands; and, however grateful the major might be, he would not be likely to lose sight of this.

He had left his own home, in Louisiana, at the age of fifteen; his mother having died, and his father, a morose man, manifesting little interest in, or affection for his only child.

Lured to Texas, by stories of the wild, free life in that land of romance, he had made his way to San Antonio, and at once began border life, by engaging, as an out-rider, on the San Antonio and San Diego mail stage route.

The duty in such cases, is to gallop by the side of the stage mules, and lash the animals at great speed; the driver only holding the reins.

Afterward, young Dave Dubois had joined the Rangers, and became a skilled trailer, and crack shot; perfecting himself in these frontier accomplishments, until at length he became noted, as when introduced to the reader.

A retrospection, embodying these facts, caused Dandy Dave to speculate as to the present state of affairs with his father; and he resolved to consult him, at his earliest opportunity.

He felt convinced, that his father, when he became satisfied that his son intended to settle down in life, would advance means sufficient to stock a ranch.

But Dandy Dave soon remembered that these speculations were premature. Much, that would bear on the changing of the lives of both Mamie and himself, would pass before they might, with reason, think seriously of linking their lives together.

That the villainous uncle of Mamie—whom Dave knew to be no relation to her, whatever—would leave no stone unturned to accomplish his sworn revenge, there could be no doubt.

Lanewood had been wounded, and the young scout had himself killed the horse of the chief plotter. He, therefore, did not believe that they would again come together, at least not for some time; and then they would, probably, be obliged to lie low until their wounds healed.

In this way, Dave began to feel little apprehension from the miscreants; although he felt certain that outlaw Mexicans would seek revenge for the shooting and hanging of their comrades, in San Antonio.

Consequently, the young scout kept a sharp lookout, with revolver ready to pull trigger at the first sign of danger.

While thus proceeding, after passing more than half the distance between the "open" where he had met his fate, and the ford of the Medina, Dandy Dave suddenly jerked his horse to a halt, upon turning a bend in the road. At the same time, he gave vent to his surprise and apprehension.

At once the young girl sprung upward, aroused from her dreamy happiness, and cried:

"What is it? Oh, do not tell me that danger is again upon us!"

A glance down the road, however—which was here for a long distance straight—betrayed the true state of affairs.

Two horsemen were galloping toward them at terrific speed.

"For God's sake!" implored the girl; "for my sake, turn into the mesquites!"

"Surely you do not intend to fight? Oh, do try and avoid those men! I know they must be foes; perhaps they are the very wretches from whom you rescued me."

"Fear not, Mamie! You might trust in me, I should think. Why, your bravery must have vanished suddenly. What is the cause?"

Dandy Dave had recovered from his own startled surprise, and banished apprehension.

"I do not fear for myself," she said, "but for you. You are so daring and reckless."

"I should have laughed had I been alone, Mamie, and should not have been in the least 'set back' at the sight of but two possible enemies—most certainly I should not have halted, had you not been in my care. It's funny, is it not?"

"I do not see anything amusing about it," was the young girl's answer. "But do tell me what you are going to do?"

"I must either turn about and make a run with you, or else drop you in the bush and give those night-riders to understand that I run this road myself."

"Then do gallop back, and quickly!" she pleaded. "They will shoot you. Perhaps we shall be overtaken!"

Dave made no reply for the moment. He was gazing intently at the approaching horsemen.

Presently he exclaimed:

"We shall not be overtaken, Mamie, but we shall meet them fearlessly."

"My darling, these are our friends in place of enemies. That is Blacksnake Bill who is riding the roan, to the left."

"On, White Stocking, on!" spurring his steed forward. "You see, my dear little girl, that you have not been forgotten."

"Oh, Dave! are you sure it is Bill?"

"It is the wagon-master, most certainly! Watch how he swings his whip. That motion gives him away. But who has he with him?"

"There was no other white man in the camp, and his comrade is white. Your father, as you know, was wounded; so it cannot be he."

"Spur on! It is my father—I know him!"

The overjoyed maiden could say no more. Tears of gratitude choked her utterance.

The young scout said not a word.

His own emotion was scarcely less.

A loud and joyous shout now came from the two horsemen, as Dandy Dave circled his sombrero over his head in friendly salutation.

They were sufficiently near, by this time, to see that the horse was doubly laden, and Bill recognized the young scout.

The latter raised Mamie upward, her feet upon the saddle-horn; she, although blinded by her tears, waving her hands.

The shout that then burst from the on-galloping horsemen, was the quintessence of joy and relief; and, had Dave gained naught else, this would have recompensed him for the trouble he had voluntarily taken upon himself in the efforts he had made.

But, for all that, the young man was far from pleased at the advent of the major and Bill; for he must, he knew, now lose the pleasure, the joy, of holding Mamie in his arms.

Dandy Dave was but human, and not so exceedingly selfish, after all, as to be inexcusable under the circumstances.

In two minutes more Major Moreland dashed up, his arms outstretched, and the tears rolling down his cheeks.

"Oh, papa! Dear papa!"

Mamie could say no more.

"My child! My darling!" he exclaimed, clasping his daughter to his breast, and speaking in a broken voice, and full of emotion; "thank God! I hold you in my arms once more!"

"Pard, put it thar!" cried out Bill, as he galloped up, and stretched out his hand to Dave; "may ther good Lord fergit me, an' may ther Evil One snake me over ther coals, ef Blacksnake Bill ever fergits Dandy Dave, an' this hyer night!"

"Ye're a brick, a pressed brick; solid an' squar', clean through! I knowed hit; I'd ha' tuck a double-bar'l'd afferdavy on hit, an' I tole ther major so. But he war plum lunnyfied—his idees war on a wild stompede."

"I know'd yer'd git Miss Mamie back, sure es she war livin'; ef yer hed ter rip up ther hull country, from hyer ter ther Grandee. I swar, I'm all broke up!"

Dave sat still and silent, after his "shake" with Bill; the latter turning his horse to prevent his face being seen, and brushing his sleeve across the same. He then squirted tobacco-juice afar over the head of his beast, and chewed vigorously at a prodigious "hunk" of "nigger-head," which he tore off, as he ejected the old chew.

And that meeting of father and daughter was most affecting; each meeting the other, as if brought back from the tomb—as if, having been resuscitated miraculously, and death's icy clutch removed, they had a right to mingle their tears for the time, oblivious of the presence of others—oblivious of their surroundings.

And the silvery moon smiled placidly down upon them; and, at the same time, a little to the east of them, upon a horde of yellow-

skinned Mexican marauders, with whom was a pair of white-skinned and black-hearted miscreants, who wound singly through the chaparrals, urging their mustangs toward the Rio Medina. And their object—

To again plunge that lovely maiden into despair and misery, and spill the blood of her old father, and of the brave and daring young scout, Dandy Dave!

A horde of cowards, who chose the dead of night to strike their defenseless and unsuspecting victims, when sleep bound them, and they had neither power nor opportunity to defend themselves; thus sleep, the twin sister of death, being transformed into death itself.

So, in Indian-like manner, and with an Indian-like purpose—their aboriginal nature and passions to the front—on glided the outlaw band, with Lance Lanewood and Bob Barnes, toward the Pleasanton Ford.

CHAPTER XXVII.

RECAPTURED.

MAMIE MORELAND was overcome with relief and joy, at realizing that her loved father was indeed alive and unharmed; and folding her to his breast, that father felt that no words could ever give expression to his happiness and gratitude.

But soon, the young girl's mind reverted to him, who was all in all to her, and to whom this joyous meeting was due.

Disengaging herself, partially, from the fond paternal embrace, she said, quickly:

"Thank Heaven, my dear father, we have met once more, after the terrible events of this black, black night! But we must not, in our rejoicing, forget that we owe not only this meeting, but my life, and that of Munroe also, to this brave and good man, Dandy Dave!"

Retaining but one arm about his daughter, Major Moreland dashed his sleeve across his tear-dimmed eyes, and spurred up to the side of the young scout's horse. Then, extending his hand, and grasping that of Dandy Dave, wringing it warmly, he burst forth, in the fullness of his heart:

"Forgive the seeming discourtesy and self-forgetfulness of a distressed parent, my dear friend! May Heaven bless you for your self-sacrificing, noble, and daring services to me and mine, this night!"

"Never shall I forget, to my dying day, the anguish I have suffered; and the heavenly joy, born of your skill and bravery, that has followed."

"Henceforth, I shall ask to have the honor of bearing toward you a fatherly regard and friendship. My house shall be a home to you as long as I am blessed with life; and I know that my children, whom you have saved from death—from the vengeance of a cowardly miscreant, who has degraded and disgraced his own father's name, and sought the blood of his brother, and of that brother's children—I know that they will never cease to love and honor you!"

"Major Moreland," returned Dave, with deep emotion, "I have done no more for you and yours than I should have done, or attempted to do, for any worthy persons under the same circumstances."

"I have for years made war on all outlaws, and fought crime; and I presume I shall continue to do so until some yellow, red, or white miscreant gets the drop on me, and ends my career. But, I am grateful for your kind expressions."

"I appreciate your plain-spoken and sincere words of regard, and I am proud to have gained your proffered friendship. I have been more than repaid for the little that I have done to defeat the dastards, who sought to remove yourself and your children from the earth."

"I have been permitted to witness the reunion between father and daughter which I had been instrumental in bringing about."

"However, the hand of the all-ruling Power had directed me in a most miraculous manner."

"You must acknowledge, upon reflection, that it would be reasonable to suppose that I knew more of this plot against you and your family than appears on the surface; otherwise, it is not likely that I should have galloped to the Rio Medina, after having had your wounded son attended to, after his life had been twice attempted in San Antonio."

"And I will say that, in a strange manner,

I became acquainted with the intentions of the plotters, while far from here; but I knew you not, nor did I ever expect to meet you.

"The villains and their intentions were recalled to my mind by the mention of a name, in the cries of a mob of outlaw Mexicans; and my suspicions were verified upon learning the name of your son, after I had prevented a hired assassin from murdering him.

"I know much more than you think; more of your family history than you, yourself, know, I think, or can imagine. This is strange, but nevertheless true.

"I cannot help thinking that I have been chosen and directed, by One who holds the scales of justice, to right a great wrong, and save your family from death; as well as to bring retribution upon one who is far more cowardly and merciless than the Apaches of the Pecos.

"This man calls himself Lancelot Lanewood.

"You, Major Moreland, believe him to be your father's son—the child of a second marriage—and this has been the one great milestone of misery about your neck through life.

"But, thank Heaven, I can relieve you of that burden; which will prove my first assertions, in connection with my being providentially directed to defeat the miscreants, who nearly reached one success in his plot to remove the Moreland family, and claim your estates as next of kin.

"Major Moreland, let me tell you, that man of the cadaverous countenance, who, this night, sought to kill yourself and your son, and bear your daughter to a terrible fate, is not related to you in any way whatever! This I can prove.

"Your father was never married, in reality, to that wretch's mother; and more than that I can make known when the time comes for me to do so.

"But all this, I swear, shall be wrung from the lips of the dastard, Lance Lanewood, and in your presence; that is, if it be among the human possibilities to capture him."

During this strange revelation of the young scout, both the major and Mamie stared at him in the greatest amazement.

Here was a man whom they had but just met for the first time, showing a knowledge of their family history, which caused them to look upon him with feelings akin to superstitious awe and reverence.

It was little short of miraculous.

But, when Dandy Dave asserted that the miscreant, Lanewood, was not their relative, these feelings were intensified. But they were instantly crowded to the background, by the intense relief and joy of both, which fairly dazed them with surprise and bewilderment.

Neither of them was capable of speech, but Major Moreland again grasped Dave's hand while Mamie's also closed over his wrist; the two gazing into the young scout's face with most strangely mingled expressions.

Blacksnake Bill sat in his saddle quite near, also quite bewildered by what had been said. His gaze was fixed upon the trio, his mouth was wide open; and his emotions were so strong that, for the time, he even neglected to masticate the inevitable "nigger-head."

"In the name of reason and justice, what do I hear? Am I in a dream? Has this night been chosen for a panoramic display of torturing terror, to end with a rose-tinted and heavenly scene, bringing with it a dreamy happiness, born of a relief and joy too deep for words to express?"

Thus exclaimed the old planter, as soon as he was able to articulate.

"You have heard nothing but the truth, major; and that I intend to prove.

"But we must not forget that Miss Mamie should be carried to camp at once.

"She has suffered more this night than many of her sex could endure, and retain reason or life; and she has proved herself a heroine.

"Well, Bill, we'll ride in advance. Major, you and I will talk this over, and I'll explain in camp. This is no time or place to linger. There is danger and death in the air of the chaparrals!"

Dandy Dave spurred on, Blacksnake Bill by his side, followed by Major Moreland with

his daughter in his arms—the most astonished and bewildered, as well as rejoiced pair, at that time, within the boundaries of the Lone Star State.

"Father in Heaven, I thank Thee from my inmost soul! Do Thou bless, now and forever, Dandy Dave!"

Thus cried out the major, while Mamie clung about his neck, weeping tears of joy.

Surely it had been a most eventful night to the Moreland family, and those who had been connected with them, whether as friends or foes.

But little did either one of the quartette, who traveled along that dusty, mesquite-bordered road toward the ford, imagine that it was possible for aught else to occur that could plunge them into anguish and hopeless despair, far exceeding that which they had already suffered in the first half of that night of horrors.

Close after the scout and wagon-master followed the old planter, with his daughter nestling to his breast; these last two conversing in low and earnest tones, in regard to the words of the young scout. Mamie also related to her father the circumstances connected with her rescue, omitting, of course, the little episode that had passed between Dave and herself.

Thus, on they proceeded, Dave and Bill chatting over details of events that had occurred during the night, until they approached the ford.

Both then glanced in their rear, to assure themselves of the near approach of the major and his daughter, and then galloped ahead, in order to enter the ford and cast water over their animals to cool them and remove the dust.

They dashed down the steep bank into the stream, little dreaming that, from the simple fact that their horses were covered with dust, their lives had been saved.

Upon plunging into the river, and when about to bend forward to throw the water with their hands upon the beasts, the attention of the two men was instantly drawn by a ringing shout of joy from beyond the stream; and they discovered young Munroe Moreland advancing at headlong gallop, on the road from San Antonio, to enter the ford.

The boy was pale as death, and clinging to his saddle-horn. Dandy Dave, with an outcry of amazement and deep concern, urged his horse through the ford to meet the youth, as did also Blacksnake Bill.

Both reached the gravelly bank just as Munroe Moreland galloped up near them; but not ten paces from their horses' heads the boy jerked his steed to a halt, and with a yell of mortal anguish, his eyes fixed and starting and his mouth agape, pointed over the river and up to the high bank, down which Dandy Dave and Bill had just urged their horses.

On the instant, the two latter whirled their animals about, as loud cries and yells of exultation filled the air; to behold a scene, which they would never forget, until their dying day—a scene which caused them to be faint with anguish, and their blood to chill within them.

Major Moreland, with Mamie in his arms, her arms extended appealingly and prayerfully toward Dandy Dave, while shrieks of fear and terror came from her lips; thus galloped the old man and his daughter, toward the steep decline that led to the ford, and not more than ten yards from the verge of the same, as the trio of beholders caught sight of them.

The major was spurring at every bound, but close upon him dashed Lance Lanewood, his ghastly face more fiendish in expression, and Bob Barnes immediately following him; while, in their rear, thundered a score of yellow-skinned Greasers, the merciless Marauders of the Rio Grande!

Their *escopetas* were clutched, their snake-like eyes were darting glances of hatred, and their features were contorted with baffled rage; from having arrived, but a few moments too late, thus being prevented from capturing the whole party of detested Texans.

Madly Lance Lanewood drove spurs, and his horse bounded directly upon that ridden by Major Moreland, upon the very brink of the approach to the ford. The steed of the miscreant struck the major's animal hard

against the shoulder, causing the beast to fall headlong; but the dastard grasped Mamie, and jerked the screaming girl into his arms, at the instant that her father was hurled headlong down the steep bank, his horse following him.

A perfect pandemonium now ruled on the south bank of the river.

The bandits galloped, in a mob, up to the two ruffians, Lance and Bob; whose mad fury and thirst for revenge had caused them to take the lead, and maintain it, as the horde neared the stream.

Although Dandy Dave was most dumfounded and greatly agonized, he did not lose his habitual quick judgment. Instantly, this most distressing and totally undreamed of event was viewed from all points, and his plan formed.

Clutching the bridle rein of Munroe, and spurring his own horse, he yelled:

"Spur for your life, Bill, to cover!"

And the order was not given any too soon, for a rattling discharge of *escopetas* rung on the night air, at the very moment that the trio shot into the undergrowth beneath the towering trees, to the north of the ford; and but a few feet from where our friends had viewed the terrible tableau. Even the very expression of the features of the miscreants beyond the Medina—which was narrow at that point—being plainly shown in the bright silvery moonlight.

"Come on, Bill, and don't waste a bullet!"

Thus called out Dandy Dave, as he sprang from his horse, clutched his carbine, and dashed to the edge of the bank, amid the trees.

Just in time, did Bill and Dave reach their stations; for two Greasers had sprung from their horses, and down the bank grasping Major Moreland, who had clutched a projecting bush at the south of the ford. They were then, as our friends raised their carbines to shoulder, dragging the old planter from the water.

"Plug the down-stream Greaser, Bill!" cried out Dave; "now!"

The blended report of the two carbines rung out, and both bandits shot forward, head-foremost, into the river!

"Swim down-stream! Swim for life, major!"

Thus yelled the young scout, as he threw down his carbine, and jerked his revolvers.

With vengeful yells, furious at the death of their comrades, a half-dozen of the marauders sprung from their mustangs, and dashed down to recover those who had been shot; thinking they might not have been killed outright.

As they ran, they fired into the undergrowth, at the point from which they had seen the spurts of fire, and where the smoke of the powder still curled. Bullets pattered, cutting branch and vine; but too high to harm the two Texans who crouched in the chaparral.

Dandy Dave saw the limp form of Mamie Moreland clasped in the arms of Lancelot Lanewood; while Bob Barnes sat his horse, beside that of his perfidious pard, gazing gloatingly, and with a murderous thirst for revenge, upon the upturned, deathlike and angelic face of the poor girl.

The sight was one to drive the young man insane with anguish and fury; but he dared not fire upward. The villains had placed themselves in such a position, that a shot from below would have endangered their lives.

With set teeth, and fury blazing eyes, Dave hissed:

"Fire away, Bill! Not one of them reaches the upper bank!"

Crack! crack! crack! A perfect rattling fusillade of revolver-shots followed.

With wild yells of terror, mingled with shrieks of deathly agony, the bandits, on the steep bank, one after another, shot down into the dark waters, and were borne away by the swift current.

With loud cries of dismay and terror, at the sight of this wholesale slaughter, the mounted marauders whirled their mustangs to flee; hastened by the whirring sound of bullets fired by Munroe Moreland, who had climbed a tree, from whence he could shoot, without endangering his sister.

Two more bandits fell, while the remainder, with Lance Lanewood and Bob Barnes in their midst, the former still clutching the

senseless form of poor Mamie Moreland, dashed from the ford, and plunged into the mesquite chaparral, to the south of the road.

With a groan of anguish, Dandy Dave now rushed toward his horse, calling out, frantically, to his comrade, as he ran:

"Come on, Bill! We'll save her, or die in the attempt. I'll have revenge, if it takes a lifetime to accomplish it. I swear it!"

"Oh, Mamie! My poor darling Mamie! May Heaven sustain you!"

And indeed the hapless maiden would need strength, beyond anything that was mortal, to sustain her, when she should recover, and find herself in the power of her former captors—when she should again look upon the loathed countenances of Lance Lanewood and Bob Barnes, and realize that these black-hearted and ruthless miscreants were now reinforced by the bandits of the Bravo!

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A WAITING IN AMBUSH.

A MORE agonized three human beings than Blacksnake Bill, Munroe Moreland, and Dandy Dave, it would have been difficult, if not impossible, to find in all Texas, as they flashed glances at each other, when the scout and the wagon-master reached their horses, and the youth clambered down from his perch in the tree to join them.

Munroe was ghastly pale, his eyes wild and bloodshot, and his face drawn with mental agony that was most painful to behold.

The horse of Major Moreland, at that moment, trotted, with alternate neigh and snort, from the river, to join its kind; the animal being to all appearance, unharmed by its roll down the steep bank into the river.

The advent of the horse caused them to recall to mind the fact that the major himself was undoubtedly still in the river; and they hastily reloaded their weapons, while Dave gave a halloo, as a signal to the old planter.

To the joy and relief of all, an answering sound of some kind reached their ears, but it sounded more like the last hopeless cry of a lost soul than aught else that could be imagined.

Munroe gave vent to a groan of anguish.

The situation of affairs had not admitted of speech, even had not the emotions of the party been too torturing to admit of giving them expression in words.

Thrusting his revolvers into their holsters, and slinging his carbine over the saddle-horn, after reloading, Dandy Dave spoke; but his voice was so unnatural that he himself was almost startled by the sound.

"Munroe," he said, "why did you leave San Antonio? You are not strong enough to follow the trail."

"We have rescued your sister once from those vile wretches, but you have just witnessed her recapture. It is perfectly astounding, this meeting of the miscreants with the Mexican bandits, and securing, as they evidently have done, their services."

"Your father's life has also been attempted. He was shot in much the same way that you were; a bullet that was intended by his so-called brother to have killed him, glancing off his skull."

"You can understand by all this that serious business is ahead. We must ride our horses to death if need be to overtake those inhuman monsters."

"That is, Bill and I must do so."

"You had better return at once with your father to camp. You cannot stand the run."

The young scout spoke very rapidly, while all remounted and proceeded from the timber; Blacksnake Bill leading the major's horse, as Dave had expressed his opinions or desires, and explained events feebly to young Moreland.

The latter looked reproachfully at Dandy Dave as he replied with firmness:

"I shall ride with you. I must go and assist in the rescue of my sister. You must not forbid me, for I am determined. I shall ride, as long as I can cling to my saddle!"

The young scout saw at once that it would be useless to reason any further with the boy.

As the trio galloped toward the water's edge, Major Moreland, dripping wet, came running up the bank near them.

He had striven to swim across in a direct

course as much as possible; but he had been swept a considerable distance down the river.

"After the fiends!" he exclaimed. "After them, my friends! I'll have their hearts' blood, for stealing my child from me again!"

"Oh, Heaven, give me strength! Preserve my Mamie, my darling! Oh, my poor boy! Munroe, my son; you are here, and alive!"

"What a night this has been! What a black, black night!"

"Ride, my friends! Gallop! Spur home! My daughter, my angel Mamie must be torn from that ghastly-faced fiend, who dares to call himself her uncle."

"On! on! I am with you to the death!"

Such were the crazed utterances of the distracted father, as soon as the power of articulation came to him.

And more like a madman than a sane being appeared Major Moreland; the state of his mind being fully shown by his words.

It was truly agonizing to see and hear him.

He had already bounded into his saddle, before he had spoken as has been recorded.

"Keep cool, everybody; and govern yourselves, or we shall not succeed."

Thus counseled Dandy Dave, as he urged his horse into the stream; all being in such haste that the waters were splattered on all sides.

"Shoot off your revolver, major, before the caps and powder get thoroughly saturated—then reload. We must lose neither time nor opportunity."

"Remember, all, that if you allow yourselves to become too much excited, you will lessen your chances of success. If we do not keep cool and collected, all is lost; and poor Miss Mamie is doomed to a terrible fate."

"Remain in my rear and I will lead you on to vengeance—on to the rescue of the innocent!"

"I have sworn to save her, and to punish the cowardly miscreants who have so outraged the laws of God and man."

"Their fate is sealed. I swear it!"

"May the God of Justice aid me to keep my oath of vengeance!"

"Amen!" came from all, more as a groan than a spoken response; while each raised his clinched fists upward.

It was evident that all were equally bent on rescue and retribution.

Major Moreland fired off his revolvers, as directed; the dull, low reports proving that more than half of the powder had been saturated.

Up the bank tore the horses to the level at the top; the major reloading at full gallop, while Dandy Dave, followed by Munroe Moreland and Blacksnake Bill, plunged after the old planter, and into the mesquites.

This was at the same point at which the abductors of Mamie had entered the thickets; and the keen eyes of the young scout darted glances on all sides and ahead, of them, detecting instantly, as he did so, this or that freshly-broken branch or twig. He alone noticed these things.

But even Dandy Dave cared little for the trail, after passing a sufficient distance to satisfy him as to the destination of the two marauding miscreants with their prize.

Well he knew that they were pointed for the San Miguel, and near the head-waters of the same.

To-morrow's sun would find them encamped, and the young scout knew a short cut by which he believed he and his friends could reach a branch of the San Miguel, and travel down it, unperceived by the abductors; while they, themselves, would be able to observe the movements of the ruffians, for the good reason that the latter would soon be forced to travel over the open plain, toward the south.

This they must do, because the belt of mesquites stretched but a short distance beyond the Medina; except at a westerly course, where the cover was good until the creek was nearly reached.

With this course in view, the same being explained to the major and Munroe—Bill knowing all about the favorite route, and agreeing with Dave—thus planning, they all dashed on, at as great a speed as was possible in the chaparral; all determined, and resolute, filled with hatred, and a thirst for revenge upon the vile conspirators.

And besides, they had, each and all, a pity and sympathy for poor Mamie Moreland, that was most torturing to their hearts.

The glorious Southern sun slowly arose above the eastern horizon line, transforming the millions of dew-drops upon grass blade and prairie flower, into glittering jewels, and darting into the timbered shades of the Rio San Miguel, arrows and bars of golden light.

These banished somewhat the somber gloom, the funereal-like arches and domes which were formed by the limbs of the towering trees; there thickly draped with long, drooping festoons of Spanish moss.

Beneath, the undergrowth was dense, except at points here and there, where natural grass-grown "opens" afforded cool lurking-places for deer, and antelope, and mustangs.

These, too, were favorable points for small camps, where men might remain concealed for months from observation, or discovery; did not some tell-tale trail betray them to a keen-eyed scout.

To the northeast stretched a vast plain, to the far-away mesquite chaparral; amid which we have followed our friends, and their merciless foes, the outlaws from the Rio Bravo, and the vengeful white miscreants, Lanewood and Barnes.

Stretching, in a serpentine course, a point west of north, is an irregular line of timber, marking the course of a creek, which is a branch of the Rio San Miguel.

Between this creek and the river, and near to the junction of the two streams, is a triangular section of more luxuriant monster timber; beneath which, is at least an acre of clear space, utterly devoid of undergrowth. The eastern portion of this, furthest from the streams, where the huge trees end, is a grass-covered oasis, amid the sea of trees and bushes.

On this verdure-clad space are nearly a score of mustangs; hollow-sided, and their hair covered with dry foam and perspiration. The saddle and bridle-marks, plainly defined, besides bleeding flanks, betrayed a long and rapid run from danger, or in chase.

Beneath the immense trees are spread *serapes*, or Mexican blankets, one end of each being thrown over a saddle; and upon these, in a deathlike slumber, lay a number of yellow-skinned brutal men—Mexicans, of the lowest stamp; crime being plainly marked upon their brutal faces.

A dozen of these there are, all armed to the teeth; while, near to the river, sits another, his back against a tree-trunk, and his *escopeta* held between his knees. At the border of the grass-grown "open" sat still another, guarding the horses of the band.

A sweeping glance revealed all that has been described, but a more careful inspection will show three others, whose faces are white, two of them most ghastly, and deathlike, and the third, bloated and purple-tinged.

One of these is a most angelic maiden, who is bound hand and foot; her wealth of wavy hair being disheveled, and lying beneath her shoulders.

These are lying at some distance from the Mexicans, and toward the river.

They, also, are upon blankets, with their saddles in use, as pillows.

The young girl is beneath a drapery of vines; and her eyes are wide open, fixed, in hopeless, deathlike despair, upon a little patch of blue sky, which is seen far above, between the leaves that are elsewhere dense.

Agony of soul is stamped upon the fair face; as well as bodily fatigue, approaching prostration.

Were not the eyes open, betraying the anguish and terror that tortured the brain, an observer would be positive that he was gazing upon a corpse.

It is the twice abducted maiden, Mamie Moreland; and near her lay the two villainous captors, while beyond them slumbered the bandits.

Both Lanewood and Bob Barnes are fast asleep; but, even in their slumber, their brutal passions are dominant, as can be easily seen.

Their faces contort with looks of hate, which changes to terror; and then with merciless fury, which merges into horror.

Their hands clench, their teeth become set, and grate viciously; their forms twist, and groans and gasping cries of fright alternate—

ly break from their lips. It is not the slumber of the just and good—that much is plainly perceptible.

Blood-smear'd bandages are bound about Bob's head and shoulder, while the arm of Lanewood is done up in the same manner. This renders their appearance still more revolting and repulsive.

An observer of this camp and its occupants would have no difficulty in deciding the character of the men, and that the maiden was a captive. Also, that, through fears for their personal safety, they had galloped headlong, nearly breaking down their animals.

So much for the camp of the marauders.

Now let us look across the creek from the same, to the westward.

Beneath towering trees, near the margin of the stream, in a small "open," are four panting horses. Their saddle-girths are loosened, the bridles slipped and hanging upon the saddle-horns, the neck-ropes attached to saplings; and slowly, listlessly, the beasts are cropping the wild rye, which grows rank and luxuriant around them.

On the border of the undergrowth which borders the bank of the creek, and near to these horses, crouch three men and a boy—all betraying evidences of fatigue.

This, however, lessens but little the vengeful fury, the murderous hate and determination that are stamped upon their agonized faces as they gaze in the same direction.

We follow that gaze, and we wonder not that they look so.

Between the tree-trunks, beyond the creek, some distance on the further side, they can see the ghastly face of Mamie Moreland.

We know them now.

They are the sworn rescuers and avengers of the innocent—Major Moreland, his son Munroe, Blacksnake Bill, and the scout, Dandy Dave.

They have come thus far, and they are waiting, but impatiently.

They are a quartette, whose anguish, hatred and thirst for revenge makes them invincible.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A NEW MOVE.

OUR friends gazed through the screen of twigs and leaves upon the silent, still and deathlike form of poor Mamie Moreland with an agony that racked their very souls; the somber shades, the drooping gray moss hanging pall-like over her, and seeming to befit her appearance and apparent condition.

At the distance from which they viewed the sad sight, no expression could be detected in the fixed eyes of the captive maiden; the same appearing glassy, in perfect keeping with her ghastly and corpse-like face.

To those who so loved and adored her, and who now crouched in the undergrowth, this sight was excruciating and almost unendurable.

Yet they were forced to remain inactive.

He to whom she was, as affection is graded, the most dear; who adored, worshiped and dreamed but of her; who would have risked life a thousand times to save her—to him this ordeal was terrible. Had it not been that he was considering her safety beyond all else, he would have rushed into the camp at once.

But well did Dandy Dave know that these marauders cared no more for the life of a woman than an Apache would. So he must be patient.

Did he reach her, cut the bonds by which she was held, and strive to escape with her, they would both be riddled with ounce bullets from those *escopetas*.

He could see the sentinels, and he knew that the bandits would awaken at the slightest alarm, clutch their weapons, and lose no time in firing upon any intruders.

He and his friends were now in the enemies' country, and must act accordingly.

Although those outlaws were cowards at heart, they would fight with the most desperate fury, when situated as they were, especially after having lost so many of their number.

This latter fact gave the young scout some hope, in regard to there being an open rupture between the two whites and the bandits, upon the latter awakening and fully realiz-

ing that, not only had they lost ten of their best men—that number having been shot—but had gained nothing whatever.

All chance of capturing the wagon-train had been lost, by the alarm that had been created at the ford; and the plunder of the train had been the consideration offered by Lanewood for their services. Of this, Dandy Dave could have no doubt.

Had not Lance a large amount of gold with him to divide among the bandits, his chances for further protection by them would be slim, even were he permitted to escape with his life. And Bob Barnes would share his fate, beyond question.

If the outlaw horde became furious at the existing state of affairs—as it was only natural to suppose that they would—and dash for the Rio Grande, leaving the two miscreants and their captive; then Mamie could be easily rescued, and the dastards punished by death at the end of a lariat.

If, again, the Mexicans became so furious as to decide upon executing the hopeful pair who had been the means of bringing the disaster and death that had decimated their numbers nearly one-half; then, during the excitement, Mamie might be saved, without endangering the poor girl's life.

Thus reasoned Dave to himself, and then explained this to the major, Munroe and Bill.

The latter had, however, formed similar conclusions.

But it had been an exceedingly difficult matter to curb the impetuosity, the mad and reckless desire of Munroe Moreland and his father, to rush at once into the camp, and rescue their loved one; but the arguments of Dandy Dave, whom they knew to be a skilled scout, and one who understood such matters much better than themselves, seconded by those of Blacksnake Bill, finally prevailed.

All, therefore, crouched, enduring the torture of mind and soul, occasioned by the sight before them. Were they to do otherwise, they knew that all would be lost.

It was terrible, and brought to the front all their powers of will; those who were not strong in this respect, being restrained by those who were—Bill and Dandy Dave—who, the reader must be aware, suffered almost beyond endurance. The latter, indeed, was obliged at times to turn his eyes away from the suffering maiden, or to cover them with his hands.

Again he would grip with fierce clutch at a sapling trunk and clench his teeth to prevent himself from bounding forward into the camp of the bandits to the rescue.

But a most startling transformation was destined to take place; startling to the observers—our friends—and most terrible to the villains who were the prime cause of all this misery, suffering and death, which has been recorded as having occurred on the eventful night preceding this beautiful and sunny morning.

And well was it that a transformation occurred as it did; for, so long had Mamie lain without motion, that her father and brother began to fear she was dead.

Even Dave and Bill were not exempt from this apprehension; and they, unable any longer to control themselves, arose, looked to their weapons, and made ready to steal forward through the creek, and dash to rescue for the maiden, or death for themselves!

Just at this instant the horses in the grassy "open" commenced to snort, and run back and forth the length of their stake-ropes; while the sentinels sprung to their feet, and almost instantly after, all the outlaws were standing with their *escopetas* ready, and gazing toward the point of alarm.

The two miscreants, however, still slept on; but Mamie languidly lifted her arm, and placed her hand upon her brow.

Although the gaze of our four friends had, very naturally, been directed toward the eastward plain—as had that of the marauders—the eyes of the young scout habitually roving, detected the movement of the captive girl, and he at once directed the attention of his comrades again to her.

Dandy Dave could not restrain a long-drawn sigh of relief.

"Thank God! My darling lives!"

Thus exclaimed the old planter in great emotion; but in a low, hoarse voice.

"Oh, isn't this terrible! Thus to be forced to remain here—must we do it?"

"Let's make a rush! What is it that has happened to startle and arouse the camp?"

So questioned Munroe Moreland.

"Dang an' double dang my ole heart, ef I'm goin' to lay low much longer!" asserted Bill, squirting tobacco-juice into the creek and chewing vigorously.

"I'm opinin' thar's somethin' s'picious over ter ther east'ard. Ef thar's any rumpus le's lunge 'cross erick et onc't!"

"Miss Mamie's got a leetle life inter her ontill yit, an' dang me ef we-uns ain't a-goin' ter hev her outen thar; 'sides layin' out some more Greasers, an' makin' cold meat o' ther cantankerous cusses what's bin splashin' hellishness 'roun' permisc'us-like, since last sundown!"

"Remain as you are, pardsl!" said the young scout, "until I give the word."

"Thank Heaven, Miss Mamie lives! Something may be about to turn up, either for or against us. Watch, and wait for the word!"

"Do nothing, unless I order it, or we may lose all. Look! There's a new arrival."

"By Georgel! It's one of the Greasers who was in the Bull's Head; and who ran out the door, just as I raised my revolver to prevent Antonio Corrillo from plunging his knife into your heart, Munroe."

"Did you notice him there, my boy?"

"Yes, Dave; I did! I remember that very wide-brimmed sombrero, and his jacket, which is covered with buttons."

"Well, my opinion is that we shall see something of a circus here, which will probably cheat us out o' our revenge."

"These Mexicans know nothing, as yet, of the slaughter at the Bull's Head, or the lynching picnic that I had; and when they do know, and that those two wretches were the prime cause of it, they'll be furious—that's all."

"I wouldn't be in the position of that pair of villains at this present moment for all the gold in the Rockies."

"They shall not cheat us out of our revenge!" exclaimed the youth with determination and anger. "We've had a hand in this game from the beginning, and we'll stay in until the last deal, and then sweep the board!"

Since the meeting of Dave with Mamie, it has perhaps been noticed that he dropped, in his conversation, the use of gaming expressions, and prairie and ranch slang, even after she had been torn from his company.

But, as the young scout had said, a Mexican rode into the camp of the outlaws, from the plain. It was evident that he was one who had been on the trail of the marauders.

At once, upon issuing from the undergrowth, the new-comer darted a sweeping glance around the camp; and upon discovering the sleeping Americans, his features assumed an expression of the most fiendish hate and triumph.

Apparently Lance and Bob were recognized.

Making a peculiar gesture with his arms, he then placed a finger across his lips to caution and enforce silence.

Dismounting, the Greaser allowed his mustang to go free among the other animals, and then strode directly toward the creek; beckoning the bandits to follow him.

All except the two guards did so, surprise and wonder upon their brutal faces.

The recent arrival pointing directly toward the covert of our friends, they at once began to suspect that he had followed their trail, discovered their place of hiding, and then passed around and through the creek, to effect their capture by alarming the outlaws.

Consequently the quartette of impatient skulkers made ready for a terrible fight, and against fearful odds.

However, their suspicions were soon banished, for the new-comer halted on the bank of the creek, the bandits gathering around him.

They were still prevented from speaking or hailing him, at his appearance in their camp, by his warning gestures. These, apparently, puzzled them, although their alarm soon subsided as the new arrival showed no sign or expression of concern or apprehension, and he had just come from the north-

east plain, the only point from which they apprehended danger or from which it was at all liable to appear.

All this time the anxiously expectant four crouched in the little "open," their gaze alternating between the object of their sympathy and that of their curiosity and alarm.

But their suspense was to be of brief duration.

"Look, *camarados*, look!" pointing to the sleeping forms of Lance Lanewood and Bob Barnes, who had been nearly stupefied from the effects of brandy, as well as wearied with fatigue and excitement.

"*Perfidios Americanos! Demonios Texanos!*" Antonio Corrillo, Pedro Galindo, Jose Penaloza, Miguel Castro, Juan Rias and Guadalupe Gonzales—all hang! grasping an imaginary rope above his head and standing on tip-toes, his head sideways, eyes protruding, and tongue extended, in imitation of a man being strangled by hanging. It was decidedly impressive.

"Hus-s-sh!" he warned, as his audience were, in their rage, horror and fury, about to make ejaculations to express those emotions.

"Don't wake them up! They have no more to sleep after this morning. They burn—burn, where *El Diablo* waits for them!"

The slaughter at the Bull's Head was then described to them, also; many of the slain having been spies of the bandits, as were Antonio and Pedro.

"All have been killed," the Greaser went on to say, "and not one *peso* in our pockets!"

"They got our boys into the scrape to work their own ends. They cared not how many Mexicans were killed. Then, when Dandy Dave he say: 'Antonio and Pedro, you tell me who hire you to kill the boy Moreland at the Bull's Head, we not hang you, but hang them'—Antonio he was going to tell, when the two *diablos* there"—pointing in the direction of the sleeping miscreants—"ride in mesquites, and shoot Antonio and Pedro through the brain."

"So they tell not who give them doubloons to the *Americanos*. So Dandy Dave find them not out. He not hang them."

"But we have some fun. They must die, but die slow. We are *Apaches* to-day!"

The teeth of the horde of outlaws ground in their rage, their black eyes shot hate and fury, and a mad longing for revenge ruled them.

Their yellow faces contorted fiendishly.

They were murder mad.

And, considering the character of the men, it was not to be wondered at.

The spy, who now brought this information to the bandit camp, and who had evidently lurked in the bushes during the lynching of his comrades, stretched the truth somewhat, when he stated that Pedro and Antonio had been promised their lives by the young scout, if they would reveal the names of the villains who had hired them to assassinate Munroe Moreland; but it hardly needed this to cause his listeners to decide to kill Lanewood and Barnes.

Yet it had, most certainly, the effect of increasing their fury and thirst for vengeance on their guests, ten-fold.

To those, who watched this, from a little distance, it was apparent that the hypothesis of Dandy Dave was pretty nearly correct.

They still crouched in the thicket, beyond the creek, dumfounded, and at the same time enraged at the probability of being balked; cheated out of their revenge, and not daring to move hand or foot to prevent it.

They were simply helpless.

The marauders were all on the alert, and furiously mad for blood.

The new arrival, however, seemed to have not a little authority; and he, after conferring with the bandit leader, evidently came to an understanding with the latter. The consequence was, that all were, at once, given directions, in low tones, which seemed to greatly please them.

To the surprise of our friends, another transformation scene was now effected; not as in a pantomime, yet being brought about very quickly, all things considered.

The horses were all led from view: the blankets, equipments, and belongings of the outlaws, except what they had upon their persons, being secreted in thickets.

Then, over the heads of each of the two sleepers, and dangling from limbs, was suspended a noosed lariat; the slack being made fast to the trunk of the tree.

This done, our four friends were greatly alarmed and agitated—in fact, infuriated almost beyond endurance—by beholding two of the bandits grasp the blanket upon which lay the captive girl, one at her head and the other at her feet, and bear her toward the creek, while a third followed with the saddle to place under her head.

Such was the almost unearthly beauty, and deathlike appearance of the maiden, that even the merciless Mexicans were evidently much impressed; for they used great care in removing her.

To the extreme relief and joy of the anxious lookers-on, they saw Mamie secreted in a thicket, but a short distance below their position, although on the opposite side of the stream.

The bandits were, without knowing it, playing right into the hands of our friends, and in a way to please them greatly.

But a very brief space of time was occupied in the removal of everything belonging to the Greasers, from the camp, which then presented a decidedly deserted appearance.

Then every Mexican disappeared, all being hidden behind trees and in thickets, where they could see the two miscreant Americans, themselves being unseen.

A terrific yell then shot through the timber, echoing and re-echoing amid the natural arches.

Lance Lanewood and Bob Barnes sprung to their feet, in affright; their eyes becoming fixed, at once, upon the dangling noosed lariats over their heads—ominous, fearfully ominous of an ignominious death!

CHAPTER XXX.

A SECOND TIME.

THE two villains were awakened from a slumber, caused to be deathlike, by privation from sleep, unusual and continuous travel and excitement, to say nothing of other prostrating emotions. Besides these, there were the effects of the potent liquor, of which they had drank without stint, and in consequence, were in a very demoralized condition; their nerves being doubly sensitive, and the impressions made by horrid dreams, yet, to a certain extent, governing them.

It is probable that the rope of the *Vigilantes* had played an active part in those dreams; for, at once, the dangling noosed lariats caught their appalled view, and their eyes started, staring, and became fastened in horror upon the same.

Had they, in their demoralized state, been able to recall the near past, they would doubtless have at once scanned their surroundings; to ascertain the whereabouts of their bandit friends.

Their not doing this, testified to the bewildered condition in which they were.

But they soon recovered themselves partially; naturally, at first, gazing at each other. Then both shuddered, and with good and sufficient cause.

Lance Lanewood was more than usually cadaverous in appearance; his eyes, in strong contrast to his skin, being bloodshot, his facial nerves twitching; bewilderment, terror, and horror blending strangely, and giving to his features an awful aspect.

The bloated face of Bob Barnes was purplish, his thick lips were swollen and cracked, while his bead-like eyes, sunk deep in his head, glowed like fire from beneath his black and beetling brows. His short, cropped hair seemed to stand out from his scalp in the most abject terror.

Both the villains trembled like aspen leaves when disturbed by human hand; not only with fright, but for the want of stimulants to calm their nerves.

Their clothing was blood-stained, torn by the thorns of the chaparral, and begrimed with dust and dirt.

Thus they stood, a most miserable pair of wretches.

Suddenly, an awful suspicion seemed to flash through the mind of each at the same moment, and they half-whirled to their left.

Mamie Moreland, to capture whom they had risked so much, was gone!

One glance at each other, and again they

whirled—this time toward the vacant space beneath the trees near them, and where they had seen the bandits cast themselves upon their blankets to sleep.

The camp was empty!

No mustangs were in the grass-grown space beyond where they had been feeding!

Again they looked at each other in the utmost bewilderment; but this time it was blended with something like relief.

They were ready to look for the bright side of the picture, if any such there were; to see a ray of hope, even in the gloom into which they had awakened so suddenly.

Their captive was gone; but their lives, which they had at first believed to be at stake, were, for the present, safe.

They were alone, and on foot, in a wild and strange country; but that was better than an ignominious death. While there is life, there is always hope.

Bob Barnes instinctively sprung to his saddle, and tore open his saddle-bag, jerking out a flask with insane eagerness. Shaking it, he glued the nozzle to his lips, and the gurgle of the liquor sounded tantalizingly in the ears of Lanewood.

He then passed the flask to his pard, saying:

"Now, I can talk! What the deuce is up here? Where, in the name of mystery, are the Greasers; and what the deuce do those ropes and nooses mean? That's what I'd like to know."

"Hanged if I believed my eyes, until I felt of them! My nerves are shaky, and my brain befogged."

"Curses on you, Lance Lanewood, for bringing me into such an infernal scrape! We shall never get out alive. Where is that blasted girl?"

"Deuce take you, I'd have got my revenge out of her, had it not been for the cursed brandy that floored me. If this isn't a deuce of a fix, I'll give up!"

"What do you make of the racket? Speak, confound you! I'm getting desperate!"

"What can I say?" returned Lance.

"You ask the same questions that I was about to put to you. Who can tell, in our fix, what it does mean?"

Lanewood spoke in a strange and husky voice, his lips trembling, and he ghastlier than ever.

"I'll own, Bob, this breaks me all up! It is a trick of some kind. Those ropes were not left there for nothing. The nooses are intended to circle our necks, and choke out our lives."

"The infernal Greasers have gone back on us, and we shall not get out of this alive!"

"Have you your revolver, and is it loaded?"

"Yes, by St. Jago!"

"That is fortunate. Mine is all right. They feared to take our arms from us, evidently thinking we would awaken."

"Come, let us go to the creek, and pretend to get a drink of water. I want one bad enough, and to bathe my face as well."

"I'm of the opinion that we shall see something there; and, if they make a break at us, we must dash through the creek to cover, and then fight for our lives."

"Come on, Lance; I'm ready! We must stick together, I suppose; but, let me tell you this, if I'm ever out of this scrape, I pard with you no more."

"I'll never go beyond the limits of New Orleans, once I jump on the levee again—cuss me if I do! Come on, I say; and keep your eyes peeled!"

The two miscreants now started, striding toward the creek, and casting sweeping glances all around them. Never had their apprehension been greater than at this moment.

Unseen dangers are ever the most dreaded, and more especially when their character cannot even be conjectured.

Suddenly Lance Lanewood halted, giving a hiss of caution and warning. As his companion turned about, Lance pointed toward the river, saying in a low voice:

"Blast me, Bob, if there ain't the girl!"

"Well, I do swear! What, in the name of Satan, does all this mean?"

"Keep cool! We'll get out of here all right yet. The gal's all we made in the whole racket, and they haven't took her from us."

"If we can corral horses, we're hunk!"

Straight to the tree, beneath which lay the corpse-like Mamie Moreland, the two ruffians proceeded, until within five feet of the poor maiden, whom they had brought to death's door.

Just then, four deadly tubes covered them from the bushes on the further side of the creek; but they knew it not, neither did they have the least suspicion of danger from another quarter—a danger against which they would be powerless to combat.

Greatly puzzled as to the intentions of the bandits, but ready, at any moment, to dash from their covert, the major, his son, Blacksnake Bill, and Dandy Dave remained quiet, controlling themselves by a powerful effort of the will.

Thus had they waited in patience for some time.

They were destined, however, to remain in this state but little longer, before another and a sudden change of scene was to take place.

As the two miscreants reached the distance mentioned, down over the head of each dropped the noose of a lasso, over their shoulders to their elbows. Then, by a rapid and peculiar side jerk from above, they were tightened; and both men were pulled upward, swaying and helpless, shrieking in agony and dread terror, horizontal with the earth's surface!

At that instant wild yells filled the air, and the outlaws rushed from their lurking-places, clutching the howling wretches and dragging them back to the swaying lariats that had hung over them when they had awakened but a few moments previous.

There had been four of the bandits hidden in the branches of the immense tree, and it was they who had successfully cast the lassoes.

These sprung to the earth, but a gesture from their leader caused them to remain where they were and guard the captive maiden.

They, however, paid but little attention to Mamie Moreland, but kept staring upon their comrades, who, with yells of fury and exultation, adjusted the fatal nooses that dangled from the tree, around the trembling and shrieking wretches, Bob and Lance—now hopeless and ready to give up all.

The terror and bewilderment of Lanewood and Barnes so demoralized them that they could not even make an intelligible appeal for mercy.

They could not so much as ask for an explanation. Nothing except loud cries of the most dread terror and yells of agony came from their trembling lips. Cowards at heart always, this quality was certain to be displayed when real danger menaced them.

But, even could they have spoken, their voices would have been drowned by the fierce and vengeful yells and the whoops of mad fury which were shot at them continuously by the Mexican marauders, who were insane for vengeance upon those who had caused, indirectly though it might have been, the death of such a number of their comrades.

The bandits firmly believed that these two men had, purposely, and in their hatred for Mexicans, inveigled Antonio and Pedro, with their pards, into a plot assumed for a purpose of their own; and that was, in order to have them slain, using them all as tools to accomplish their own ends, and then exulting in the wholesale death they had occasioned.

Murder-mad as were the marauders, they gave no time for prayers and expostulations; but jerked up from the ground the doomed miscreants, making fast the lariats to the trunk of the tree with quick and hurried movements.

Before this was done however, our four friends, still crouching in the thicket, had been in a most unenviable frame of mind.

Suspense is never easily endured, and in their case, it was of the most torturing description that could be well imagined.

This, however was but momentary; for Dandy Dave quickly recovered from the surprise occasioned by the unexpected scene—for he had not believed that the bandits would really carry matters to such extremes—and, in a rapid manner, gave his orders to the other three.

These were given, in tones that admitted

of no hesitation, or change of purpose or plan.

Dave was, it was plain, one born to command.

"Bill, come with me! We'll attend to those four Greasers. I think we can end their life-trail right here—in fact, it must be done.

"Major, when Bill and I shoot and pounce upon the yellow devils, do you and Munroe pop away lively into the big batch up yonder, and yell for all you're worth. If we don't stampede this outfit, I'm a liar!

"We'll bring Miss Mamie over the creek, and then charge them. We can then cut down that pair of plotters before the life is out of them.

"They have got to talk before they die!

"Mind what I have told you, major, and you too, Munroe! Watch Bill and me. We'll save Mamie, or die! If we should drop, make a rush for her, run for the horses, and just 'everlastingly git up and git!' Are you ready, Bill?"

"Dang an' double dang my ole palpatator!" was the response of Blacksnake Bill, "ef I ain't chuck-full of ole he hyderphobic, an' eager fer bleed!

"We'll sock hit to 'em, an' make ther rifle, you bet; snakin' ther leetle gal 'cross crick; all hunk!

"I'll chaw bugs an' snakes, fer ther nex' six moons, es ole Rock' used ter spit hit out, ef we don't. Jist you-'uns watch!

"Lunge ahead, Dave; I'm with yer ontill my brain-box air bu'sted!"

Never, perhaps, before or since, did two men advance upon foes with a stronger determination to cut down all before them; and with more reckless daring, furious hate, and a just longing for revenge.

The form of poor Mamie Moreland, being more the appearance of death than life, was sufficient to urge them on, in an irresistible rush, before which a half-dozen men, whose hearts and souls were not in their object, must have fallen like dry reeds.

Stealthily at first, making no splash or ripple as they waded the creek, on went the two Texans, until they gained the opposite bank.

Then, like panthers, they bounded forward, their revolvers flashing but once; as they wished to retain the loads for the grand charge upon the main force.

Down dropped two of the four bandits, who had been on guard; and, as the others turned in astonishment and terror, they were clutched by Bill and Dave.

The latter did not even draw his knife, he having had barely time to return his revolver to the scabbard.

Grasping the Greaser by the belt and throat, the young scout raised him from the ground, the outlaw filling the air with his shrieks. Dave then hurled him, with herculean force, against a huge tree-trunk; the back of the Mexican striking the same, and snapping like a pipe-stem.

The bandit fell to the earth, gasping and quivering in the agonies of death.

Blacksnake Bill was equally prompt.

With the strength of two ordinary men, born of his intense fury and determination, the wagon-master clutched both hands about the throat of the remaining sentinel and flung him to the earth.

Then placing his knees on the Greaser's breast, he strangled him until senseless, afterward plunging his knife into his victim. As Bill sprung to his feet, he saw Dave rushing across the creek with Mamie Moreland in his arms.

But the signal agreed upon had been heard by Major Moreland and his son, and they had not been idle meanwhile.

At the report of the pistols the major and Munroe began firing their weapons as fast as they could pull triggers, both filling the air with yells which, with the shrieks of the bandits whom Bill and Dave were fighting, and the wild whoops of the young scout and the teamster, caused a most fearful din.

The bullets from the revolvers of Munroe Moreland and his father hurtled through the massed marauders, just a moment after they had made fast the lariats to the tree-trunk.

Nothing of this kind had been in the minds and calculations of the Mexicans. No idea of a lurking foe had occurred to them. They had planned their own work, and were

on the point of carrying it out successfully, not dreaming of interruption from any quarter whatever.

The rescue of the captive maiden, and the cutting down of the half-strangled wretches, were the last things in the bandits' thoughts.

Utterly dumfounded, the amazed and terrified outlaws stood in their tracks for a moment; they then looked around them, and took in the entire situation.

Three of their number were writhing in death beneath the swaying and quivering forms of their victims, leaving but five unharmed.

These, as may be imagined, were utterly paralyzed with dismay, amazement and terror.

The startled bandits saw Dandy Dave rush across the creek with their captive, and disappear.

An instant after, they saw him rush through the creek like a madman, joined by a youth, an old man, and a middle-aged Texan—all with weapons in their hands, and fierce, vengeful yells bursting from their throats.

With one accord the surviving marauders, with a shriek of terror, ran like deer toward the grass-grown "open," bullets hurtling around them and through their flesh and clothing.

Not one escaped to their mustangs without wounds, although not sufficiently serious to cause them to fall.

The victory was for the right, and it was complete. The foe was vanquished, and had vanished.

The captive had been rescued.

Only the work of vengeance remained.

The only fear of the avengers was that this had been taken out of their hands—that the two miscreants might be already dead.

Without losing a moment, Dandy Dave slashed the ropes with his bowie, and Lance Lanewood and Bob Barnes dropped to the earth; to all appearance, nearer death than life.

"Let them lie there!" he exclaimed. "Watch them, Bill! We must first see how it is with Miss Mamie. Come, Major Moreland!"

And at a speed which neither the major nor his son could equal, Dave bounded on in the direction of the creek, crossed it, and the next moment returned to the bank with Mamie Moreland in his arms—the poor girl senseless!

Quickly and tenderly the young scout cast the clear, cool water upon the head of the unconscious maiden, smoothing her saturated hair; his whole soul in his eyes, and his eyes moist with tears.

"Run to my saddle-bags, major, and get my brandy-flask! Hurry up, for God's sake! But no; it is not—it cannot be too late!"

Major Moreland, without a word, obeyed.

The face of the tortured father was drawn with anguish, and pallid as death; as was also that of his son. And little wonder was it, for the suspense had been killing.

Nothing but the brief and fleeting excitement just passed had sustained them; and now that it was over, the reaction left them almost helpless.

Happily for them, neither Munroe nor his father noticed the extravagant words of Dandy Dave, when the latter expressed his fear that the poor maiden was no longer alive.

Upon the return of the major, which was almost instantly, the young scout grasped the flask and administered, in his anxiety, a larger dose than perhaps was necessary; the old father and the brother of the fair girl kneeling on the sward in an agony of heart that was most painful to witness.

Soon, however, their anguish and anxiety were banished; hope and joy beamed from their eyes, for poor Mamie's lids opened, and she gazed up into the face of the young scout.

"It is you, Dandy Dave!"

These were the first words that fluttered over her almost colorless lips. Then, in a feeble manner, she held up her hands toward him.

"Heaven bless you, my poor suffering Mamie!"

Neither of them were, in their great joy and relief, conscious of the presence of oth-

ers; but Dave speedily recovered himself, and said:

"Mamie, here are your father and brother!"

Both the major and his son were blinded by tears, but they had seen and heard sufficient to realize that there had been more between that young and handsome pair than either of them had previously imagined.

Yet this caused no ill feeling, no jealousy, no anger; just the opposite, indeed, for father and son clasped hands, each knowing from that moment that Dave and Mamie loved, were lovers—each knowing that the other was pleased with the discovery, and proud of Dandy Dave.

"Papa! Oh, papa! And you too, Munroe—are you here? Oh, I am so happy!"

"The black clouds have rolled away again. I pray Heaven they may be banished forever!"

"The sun shines brightly now, on father and brother—yes, and on Dave and me!"

With tears of happiness in their eyes, the major and his son embraced fondly the one who had been restored to them; but realizing that she would require the tenderest of care, and must be taken to camp, slowly and at once.

The witnesses of the evidences of Mamie's great suffering recalled them, however, to the cause of it; and all proceeded to cross the creek once more—the young scout now carrying his rescued darling; her father and brother offering no objections to such an arrangement.

CHAPTER XXXI.

KILKENNY CATS.

MAMIE MORELAND was reclined upon the blanket again, from which she had been taken, by Dandy Dave; the major and Munroe going on in advance, and dragging the dead bandits from view.

No danger was apprehended now, from any source; but Munroe, being quite exhausted, willingly remained with his sister, reclining by her side.

Dave and the major then strode, with fierce and resolute faces, toward Blacksnake Bill and the two miscreants whom he guarded.

"Dang an' double dang ther condensed coyotes! Ef yer hedn't roved jist es yer hes, pard, I should hev carved 'em inter saddle-strings!"

"They've comed 'roun' ter biz, an' hes bin tryin' ter buy me off; whinin' fer me ter let 'em hev free range—me, Blacksnake Bill!"

"Wa-al, I sh'ud' perced ter pucker, in ther way of a smile! I sh'ud' laugh right out, jist ter think o' gittin' soft enough ter listen ter sech seum. Dog-gone my ole pal-pertator! Ef yer doesn't string 'em up, 'fore soon, I shell go plum lunnyfied!"

It had been just as Bill stated.

The miserable, half-hanged miscreants had entertained a hope, at the first, that the wagon-master might be open to a bribe—that some terms might be made with him, whereby they might renew their lease of life.

Bill had loosened the nooses from about the wretches' necks, and they had revived, as the words of the teamster proved; and a more utterly miserable, repulsive and disgusting pair of human beings it would have been impossible to conceive of.

No sooner did they cast their eyes upon the new-comers, with pleading looks, hoping to find them more merciful than Bill, than they gave vent to a howl of deathly agony and hopeless despair.

One glance was enough.

Their doom was sealed!

Major Moreland, the much-wronged old man, and the ever-to-be-dreaded Dandy Dave, were before them at last.

Here were two avengers who were merciless.

The two villains still lay upon the ground, bound hand and foot.

At once Dave slashed the cords that were about their ankles, saying as he did so:

"Now, you infernal dastards! You cowardly assassins and abductors! Stand up and listen to me! You can't? You mean you don't wish to face the music in that position."

"Bill, assist them!"

But this was asking too much of the

worthy wagon-master. Blacksnake Bill had no ambition to act as body-servant for Lance Lanewood and Bob Barnes.

For the present they might stand, sit, or lie—just as it suited them—for all he cared.

"Dang and double dang my ole heart!" he said, flatly, "ef I'll touch ther miser'ble coyotes."

"Ax me anythin' else, Dave. Ther nighest I'll come ter layin' my paws onter 'em'll be pullin' on ther lariat!"

The miscreants, however, succeeded in gaining a standing position, and remained thus, trembling in every limb.

"For Heaven's sake give me a drop of brandy!" pleaded Bob Barnes, in a husky voice.

"If we have got to die, don't torture us beforehand. This infernal scoundrel, Lanewood, has been my ruin. Through him I am here."

"He was the means of dragging me into this crooked biz, and he deserves to swing."

"I wouldn't have been with him, but I was dead broke, and he took advantage of that. He sent to New Orleans for me."

"I hain't got nothin' against any of you—I never had—but I'd like to see him swing first. It would be a satisfaction, gents. Cuss me, if it wouldn't!"

The latter part of Bob's remarks were almost entirely devoid of fear or concern; the change having been produced by a sudden thought that had flashed across his mind.

It was one that was worthy of him.

It was just what might have been expected from him, and very possibly his employer was partly prepared for it.

Bob meditated treachery to his pard.

Dandy Dave placed the flask to the wretched creature's mouth, elevated the same, and allowed him to drink until he was satisfied. He then gave Lanewood a drink, and thus addressed the latter:

"Now, Sir Dastard, I shall begin by saying that you have but a short time to live."

"You have been a villain of the deepest dye all your miserable life; but I shall give you some little space for repentance, if such a thing be possible in your case."

"Justice has triumphed at last, as it always will, sooner or later."

"You have reached the end of your rope, and you see what kind of a rope it is. Now, as a simple act of justice, repeat the words which you spoke at the hotel in Lavaca, a few days since, in regard to your parentage."

"State, also, your object in plotting to murder Major Moreland and his son, and to degrade and enslave his daughter. I insist upon your repeating every word!"

"Major Moreland, that miscreant who has caused you so much misery, is not your brother—he is no relative whatever to you, or yours. You have heard me say this much before."

"I have, and I thank God that I hear and can believe it!" exclaimed the old planter, with very evident sincerity.

"Dandy Dave," he continued, "those most welcome words have rejoiced my soul more than I can express. I owe all this to you, and far more besides."

"I begin to see light. You knew something of the diabolical plot, and have defeated the villains at every turn."

"That was my intention, sir, before you were aware that any plot existed, or that that wretch was within a thousand miles of you."

"If I mistake not, you did not know positively that he was alive?"

"I hoped most sincerely," was the reply, "that he was not; but I had a presentiment, and danger of any kind could only come from him. I knew that he had sworn a terrible revenge, and I feared he would kill my son, or abduct my daughter. Had it not been for this I should not have left my old home, and come to the border, as I set out to do."

"I had no idea that he would trace me out; but it seems he has had spies all around me. I can never, never forgive him."

"He has made my life miserable, almost unbearable, in the past; and these last villainous deeds of his—"

"No more of this at present, major," interrupted the scout.

"Now, sir," to Lanewood, "confess, as I ordered, and reveal the hiding-place of the letters of which I heard you speak—letters,

which will prove you the legal son of the man who was killed in Jackson square, New Orleans, while attempting a robbery, and which exposed the old plot of him and your mother against Montague Moreland."

It was quite evident that Lance Lanewood was dumfounded, and that he looked upon Dandy Dave with something of awe; but the brandy was coursing through his veins, and it restored him partly to his normal self.

He soon retorted, in a defiant tone:

"It is all a lie; Maurice Moreland, there, is my brother! We had the same father."

"Then you will not confess?" demanded Dave, sternly.

"I confess nothing. You cannot torture a single word from me that is not true."

"Moreland is my name, by legal right and by birth. That man beside you is, I am ashamed to own, my brother!"

The audacity of the villain astounded his hearers. What more could they say?

Lance Lanewood, it was quite clear, would confess nothing. He would die, if it came to the worst, declaring his name to be Moreland.

But there was another, who had somewhat to say on the subject.

"Hold on, gents!" cried out Bob Barnes, his voice betraying hope for himself; "give me another drink, and agree to my terms, and I will reveal all; besides telling you where to find the letters."

"Satan burn you, Bob Barnes! I'd like to throttle you," hissed Lanewood.

"I propose to give you a show, old pard," returned Bob, in apparently the utmost unconcern.

Then, turning to Dave, he asked:

"What do you say, sir scout?"

"What do you demand, in consideration for telling us where to find the letters, and adding your testimony to mine, against the claims and assertions of this worthy pard of yours?"

"All I ask is, a chance for my life, and revenge. Cut us loose, give each a knife; then, if he kills me, hang him!"

"If I kill him, give me a chance to reform. I will leave the State, and never enter it again. This, as I have told you, was none of my seeking. He got me into the scrape."

"I've lost an ear, and a heap of blood, besides being worried nearly out of my skin."

"Miss Moreland must not come near during the fight, if you let us try it, for she's a roarin' rager. It was she who slashed off my ear, and stabbed me."

"I could have held on to her, if I chose; but I dropped her in the road, for you to pick up, Dandy Dave, for I was sick of the whole biz."

"I mean what I say, every word of it, and I think you ought to give me a show for my life, even if I were not making it worth your while, as I promise to do."

"I would have left Lanewood then, but how could I? He got me into it again, because I had no way to escape from the chaparral."

"Now that you have my proposal, what have you to say to it?"

Dandy Dave conferred with Major Moreland and Bill for a moment, and then replied:

"We agree to your proposal; but first you must tell us where the papers are, and then repeat the principal points of the story to the major, who is, as you know, the most interested."

"If I reveal the secret, you may string me up, and not give me the show I asked for, after all," remonstrated Bob.

"I have given my promise, and Dandy Dave was never known to break his word."

"Yet, you are promising a man to give him favors that you deny me; and for what?—for betraying the secrets of a life-long friend!"

Thus sneered Lanewood; but for all that, he was pleased at the turn of affairs, for he believed that his usual luck would attend him, and that he would in some way escape.

"It ain't your 'put in,' Lance Lanewood!" said Bob Barnes, with a hideous grin.

"You hain't got long to linger on this terrestrial sphere; so, say your prayers, if you remember any of that kind of litera-

ture, and brace yourself, for I'm going to carve you scientifically, dead sure.

"I mean it, my cherub, and there's no getting clear of it!

"I hain't forgot your words in the chaparral, after I'd got gashed and lost my ear. You thought I'd gone back on you.

"I know you'd go back on me for a flask of brandy, and you wouldn't have to be very dry either. I know you, old pard!

"Now, gents, I'm ready to sling gab. As to the letters, you'll find them in Mr. Lance Lanewood's saddle-bags."

"Curse the luck, and eternally curse you, Bob Barnes!"

Thus hissed, rather than spoke, Lanewood. Bob proceeded to give, in detail, all that had passed between himself and Lance since his meeting with the latter at Port Lavaca.

Dave then stated what he had heard when half-asleep in the room adjoining.

This explained, to the satisfaction and the great gratification of Major Moreland, everything that he wished to know in regard to it.

All being now anxious with reference to Mamie, the two miscreants were at once cut loose, after being assured that they would be crippled with bullets and then hanged did they attempt to run.

But of this they neither of them had, it is probable, a thought at the time.

Glaring at each other like infuriated wild beasts, these two men, who had been for a long time partners in crime, stood as directed.

Their knives were in their hands, and each strove to detect the slightest movement or intention of the other by glance of eye.

Thus they remained for some seconds.

Then they met, cursing and snarling, as they slashed at each other furiously; their teeth set, and their bloodshot eyes blazing with a most murderous light.

Steel clashed against steel, sparks of fire flying, and blood spurting from trifling wounds.

Then, panting with exertion, they drew off from each other; still furious for blood, still glaring with vengeful hate.

A moment more, and Bob Barnes sprung high in the air, with hideous howls; and, when he struck the earth, bent low, and struck forward, under the guard of Lanewood, driving his bowie to the hilt in the breast of his old pard!

But, as Bob lunged forward, up went the right arm of Lanewood, and down came his blade—down into the back of Barnes, at the very instant his own heart was pierced, and separating the spinal cord!

Each was the other's executioner.

Both, with horrible groans, and the blood spurting through the air from their fearful wounds, sunk to the earth.

There they lay, their arms and legs interlocked in the death-struggles; the flaming eye of each gazing into that of the other.

A few convulsive, spasmodic shudders, and twitching of muscles, the horrible death-rattle sounding simultaneously from each, and their souls went out in company to answer for their crimes to Him, whose laws they had so long outraged with impunity.

Pards in life, and pards in death!

Of had they lain together, on the prairie, or in woodland, beneath the same blanket; now they lay in close embrace, the vilest passions stamped, amid the agonies of dissolution, upon their repulsive faces—both in close embrace, in the close embrace of death!

The spectators of this horrible conflict and death-scene turned away with a shudder, the young scout remarking:

"It was best so. Two infamous wretches are put beyond the power of inflicting misery.

"Bill, if you feel like it, drag them into a wash-out and cave the bank in on them.

"Their effects are all yours, for doing the job."

"Dang an' double-dang my gizzard!" said the wagon-master, "ef I'll tech ther cusses.

"But I'll git my nag, sling a lasso 'roun' thar trotters, an' make ther hoss drag 'em by ther saddle-horn.

"They 'pears ormighty 'fectionate, fur es persish air consarned; but dog-gone me, ef they didn't fight p'ison, clean through!"

CHAPTER XXXII.

HOME AND HAPPINESS.

THERE is little more to be told.

The death of Lance Lanewood was a blessed relief to Major Moreland, whose life had been made most miserable, through anxiety, and fears of the vengeance of the man whom he believed to be his brother. This claim, however, was now set at rest forever.

He was proved, by the letters found in his saddle-bags, to be the son of another man—the same who had claimed, in New Orleans, to be his father. Further proofs came also to light.

A confession, by the woman who had claimed to be the wife of Montague Moreland, but who was in reality that of another man, was found among some old papers, that had long been laid aside.

Poor Mamie was borne tenderly, in the arms of Dandy Dave, back to the camp on the Rio Medina; where all were received with hysterical joy by the slaves, who had believed their old and young masters, and their beautiful young mistress, to be murdered.

The maiden was laid upon her couch in the Chihuahua wagon, and never did teamster drive more carefully, than did Blacksnake Bill back to San Antonio. There a room was engaged for her, at the Menger House, where she received the kindest care, and the best of medical attendance; as did also Munroe, who needed it nearly as much.

Both recovered rapidly, love and joy doing more to effect this than medicine.

As there were no longer any fears from Lanewood, Major Moreland decided to return to his plantation, and remain there, at least until he had selected a more pleasant location, on the trips which he and his son desired to take through West Texas, with Dandy Dave.

The latter soon became the principal personage at Moreland Plantation; the major and Munroe being both rejoiced at Mamie's engagement, which was speedily announced. The old planter asserted that he was the happiest man in the Lone Star State, when Dave and Mamie walked, hand in hand, to his side, as he sat beneath the magnolias, enjoying his pipe, soon after the return. He guessed its meaning.

The object was to ask him if he had any objections to their joining hands for life.

As we know, he anticipated this.

"Heaven bless you!" he said, with tears of joy in his eyes.

"Why, Dave, my friend, she has been yours ever since the night you picked her up in the road beyond the Rio Medina. Mamie has told me the whole story. I'm proud of you, my boy!

"Bravery, honesty and virtue, are far beyond money in value.

"We all owe our lives to you, Dave; and you must never leave the old man—you and Mamie.

"If you start a ranch I reckon I must sell out, pull up stakes, and glide along.

"Bill, I know, is anxious for you to strike out for West Texas. He doesn't like the corn and cotton country. He's a 'Long-Horn,' clear through."

In his great happiness, the major rattled off this speech, seeming to be unable to say enough to satisfy him; and Dandy Dave, encircling Mamie in his arms, quietly listened, a happy smile on his handsome face.

But there was an interruption to this interview, though it did not in the least annoy the youthful pair, as they had now settled everything to their satisfaction.

In fact, it proved the very opposite of an annoyance, for the interruption was caused by Blacksnake Bill, who advanced abruptly with a letter in his hand, which he passed to the young scout, remarking:

"Dang an' double-dang my palpertator!—'scuse me, Miss Mamie, but I'm some excited—I'm bettin' thet billy-dux air from Dave's dad, an' ef so he'll skute States-way.

"Miss Mamie, will yer help me ter lariat him out ter grass, an' hobble him besides?"

"Indeed I will, Bill," said the young girl; "he can't leave you and me, we all know. That is settled, dad or no dad!

"What is it, Dave?"

The young man passed the brief epistle to his betrothed, who read aloud:

"NEW ORLEANS, LA., May 15th, 185-.

"MY DEAR SON:—

"I am pleased to hear from you, and to know you

are well; also happy to learn that you think of marrying, and settling down to steady business. Come and see me, and bring the young lady with you when she has become Mrs. Dubois; also bring Major Moreland and his son.

"Am much interested in your adventures. Have placed thirty thousand dollars to your credit in the St. Charles Bank.

"With regards to all.

"Your affectionate father,

"DANIEL DUBOIS.

"1133 Poydras street."

The old planter sprung to his feet, and grasped Dave's hand, exclaiming:

"I congratulate you, my boy! Why, this is a great surprise. Not that I think more of you for having the money—for, when you had none whatever, or claimed to have none, I regarded you as a son. However, you have given me a great and joyous surprise. Well, well!" and the major caught his daughter around the waist, and actually waltzed with her.

"We'll have a gay old time, all of us, in New Orleans. Bless you, Dave; I almost think I'll get married, too. I feel as young and gay as I did twenty years ago!"

Thus happily did our friends pass the time, until some three months after the final act in that tragic drama, of a night and a day, in which they were actors, when Dave and Mamie were united in holy matrimony.

The wedding was a grand affair, all the neighboring planters and their families being present; the beauty of both bride and bridegroom claiming the admiration of all, and their courtesy and free-hearted hospitality making many warm friends.

The bridal tour extended to the Crescent City; the father of Dave, although never in the least demonstrative, and habitually morose, being for once melted, by the beauty and winning ways of his daughter-in-law.

His cold and stern heart, too, was not a little softened by his free-spoken, joyous, noble, and handsome son.

Major Moreland, Munroe, and Blacksnake Bill arrived a week later; and all had a pleasant time in and around the old city. They returned, however, by way of Galveston; and, for a short time, Dave and his bride remained on the plantation.

But soon the young man purchased a ranch, on the upper Guadalupe, and Bill became superintendent. There Dave Dubois went extensively into stock raising.

Major Moreland ere long disposed of his plantation and went to reside with his daughter and son-in-law; Munroe entering into partnership with the ex-scout, the two being most devotedly attached to each other.

And our friends prospered as they deserved to do, all being bound by strong ties since the fearful experiences through which they had gone together.

Blacksnake Bill and Munroe spent much time in hunting, and in roaming plain and woodland, enjoying greatly each other's company; while the old major was, he declared, the most free-from-care and comfortably situated man in all Texas.

As to our hero and heroine, their hearts were one, their wishes and hopes the same; their lives being one continuous summer dream. Certain it was, that nowhere could there be found a happier or a handsomer pair than Mary Dubois, nee Moreland, and David Dubois, alias Dandy Dave.

THE END.

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